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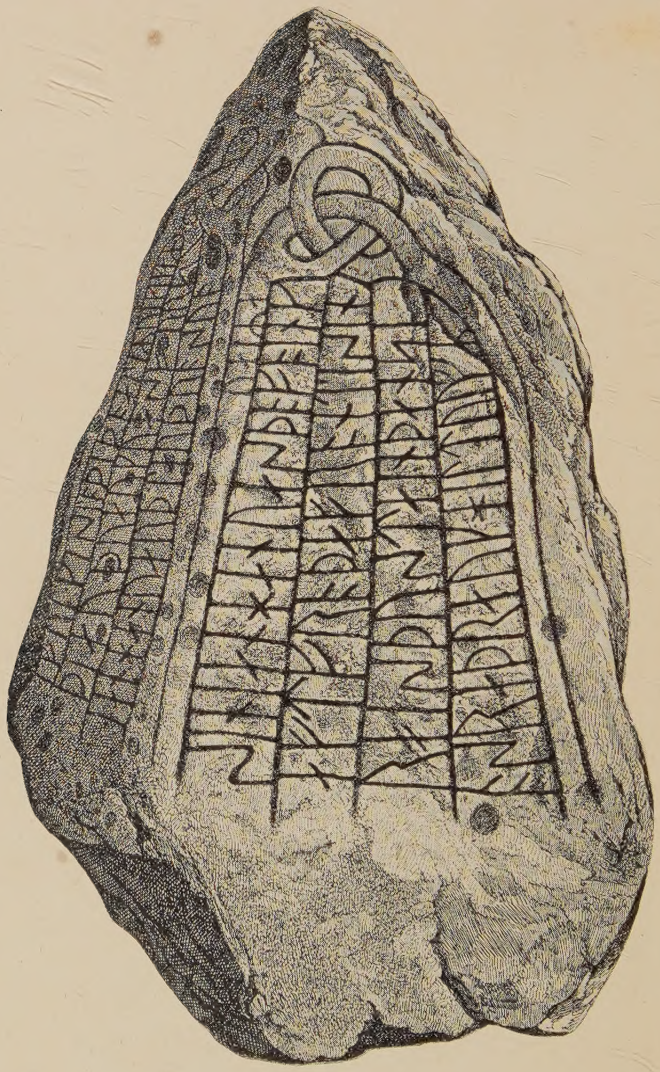
VIKING CIVILIZATION



RUNE STONE

Raised in memory of a Viking leader, at Tirsted, Denmark, about 1025

VIKING CIVILIZATION

BY AXEL OLRIK

Revised after the author's death by
HANS ELLEKILDE

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EDITORIAL NOTE

THE BOOK offered here under the title Viking Civilization *was originally written in Danish and bears the title* Nordisk Aandsliv i Vikingetid og Tidlig Middelalder. *It presents in popular form the results of Axel Olrik's scholarly research in a field in which he was preëminent, that of early Scandinavian civilization. The book has appeared in two editions in Danish and has also been translated into Swedish and German.*

The English version follows the Danish edition of 1927, which appeared after the author's death, and was edited by Hans Ellekilde, archivist in the Danish Folk Lore Collection in Copenhagen. A few paragraphs have been added from the German edition,

which somewhat expanded the chapter on the Era of the Ballad. The translation is the work of Professor Jacob Wittmer Hartmann, of Long Island University, and Hanna Astrup Larsen, literary secretary of the American-Scandinavian Foundation.

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VIKING
CIVILIZATION

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1. THE PEOPLE

THE oldest words of the Norse language that have come down to us are the names of petty tribes mentioned by Roman authors. We learn from them that the Scandinavian North was divided into a number of small tribal communities, whose names have long since disappeared or survive only in regional names, the original significance of which is no longer a part of our consciousness. In Jutland there were Sigli, Himbri, Hardi, etc.; along the west coast of Norway there were Rygi, Hordi, and Thröndi, and so on throughout the North. From these small peasant communities, sometimes headed by a chieftain, the larger combinations were evolved through wars and conflicts. Among us, as in the entire Germanic world after Arminius had first gathered the western Teutons for resistance to the Romans, the formation of states and the rise of powerful, warlike kings went hand in hand.

The first race to gain supremacy in the North was

that of the Swedes. By the great lakes at the edge of the inhabited world, they had room to clear land and to wax great. On the plains of Uppland they could not remain divided into small states and tribes, but soon learned to feel themselves a people. By the shores of the Baltic, on the lakes of the interior, and on the countless inlets that are now dry land furrowed by the peasant's plow, they plied their ships. In this country there rose a close-knit, powerful tribe of tall, vigorous people, who chose kings to rule over them, and who, in their swift ships, made viking expeditions straight across the Baltic. Among them we see the earliest flowering of that life dominated by the king and his warriors which was the ideal of the entire Scandinavian North. Here was the most sacred worshiping ground of the Asir in the groves of Uppsala. The kingdom of the Swedes, with their thingstead and sanctuary, little by little became the center of the entire eastern section of the Scandinavian peninsula, and after centuries of labor accompanied by bitter discord lasting far into the Middle Ages, the people were gradually welded together to form a single nation, the nation of the Swedes.

Denmark was the next national state to emerge. Just as, among the Teutons, "Frank" and "Saxon" became appellations covering large groups of tribes, so "Jute" and "Dane" were the only national names that remained in Denmark after the smaller tribes had disappeared. The Jutes were found on the peninsula

of Denmark, the Danes on the island of Zealand and in Skåne. Legendary reports state that the Danes first gained renown by driving out an entire tribe, the Heruli, from its ancestral holdings. Later heroic legends afford us a glimpse into a subsequent turbulent period of struggle—the period of the Migration of Nations—when every tribe aimed to expand at the cost of its neighbors. King Hroar and his belligerent nephew Hrodulf (Hrólf) could not remain in peace in the royal seat at Leire before they had crushed the Hadbards who had crossed the Baltic to attack them. The royal families of the Swedes and Jutes rent each other's flesh like blood-thirsty eagles. Shortly thereafter, without our being informed as to how the change came about, the Jutes submitted to the strong hand of the king of the Danes; tradition says that it was Harald Wartooth who destroyed all the petty states of Denmark, and that he later found his death in the land of the Gautar in Sweden, in the battle of Braaviken. When the Viking Age again brings Denmark into the full light of day, the unity of the realm is a fact that can no longer be shaken. Indeed, Denmark not only included all the country of the Danes, but there was a Danish realm that embraced adjacent regions in its domain: to the north the districts along the Christiania Fjord, to the south portions of Wendland; and this realm stood ready to subjugate other countries under its power.

Norway was the last of the three Scandinavian

countries to form a national realm. This may be largely explained by the topography. Every little tribal kingdom was cut off from its neighbors by a chain of hills; narrow valleys hid thousand-year-old customs and habits. The work of uniting the people, as had been done in Denmark and Sweden, was possible only in the regions around the Christiania Fjord and Lake Mjösen. The process did not begin until historic times, far down in the ninth century; but then it came with that sudden, eruptive energy which imparts to the history of Norway its dramatic glamour. Concentrated into a short period and all connected with the personality of the great king, Harald Fairhair, we see rapidly moving events and a motley throng of people: the hosts of warriors who flock to the lavish conqueror; the petty king who summons his tribe, steps down from his royal seat, and assumes the place of a jarl in order to become, afterwards, the man of the new ruler; or, in another region, the group of petty kings gathering for battle only to be struck down in a bloody sea-fight, while a few independent spirits remain at home on their farmsteads, knowing that it is of no avail to oppose the new king of Norway and his good fortune.

Thus the three realms were formed whose destinies formed the destiny of the Scandinavian North during subsequent ages. Denmark and Sweden are named after the tribe that became the nucleus in the formation of the new state. Norway, on the other hand,

takes its name (Norvegr, the "Northern Way" or "Northern Part") from its position with respect to the older and more southerly Danish realm, since no single tribe, but rather the will of one man, raised it to the rank of the other two.

Even more remarkable than this evolution of the state in the Scandinavian North is the development of the race and the language.

When the petty tribes of the North first appeared in history there was no important difference between them and the other tribes of the Germanic race; the Angles and Saxons at the base of the Jutland peninsula, the Svevi on the coasts of the Baltic, the Goths along the Vistula. There was probably no real line of linguistic demarcation. The Gautar of Gotland were most likely related, not in name only but also by peculiarities of language, to the great tribe of the Goths along the Vistula. The Jutes, at least at one point, approached the Anglo-Saxon-Frisian language group. Under these conditions, it was natural that the national consciousness should be uncertain and shift with the contacts that each age brought it. The tribes along the North Sea—in Hanover and on the Jutland peninsula—considered themselves as Ingwines, the descendants of a common ancestor, Ingvi; later the name Ingwines was connected with the Danes; and in the Viking Age the Swedish kings were counted as being "the race of Ingvi." On the other hand, there is no ancient designation for Scan-

dinavia as a whole; in the Viking Age such expressions as "the Northlands" and "Danish tongue" were used. The tradition of a common descent did not make its appearance until the Middle Ages.

The conditions for a separate Scandinavian development were not created until the Migration of Nations, which definitely broke the bonds uniting the northern tribes with their southern neighbors. The Angles and Saxons traveled to England; the Svevi and Goths moved southward. The lands along the Baltic were for a time deserted, but were slowly filled with a new population. Slavic tribes trickled in from the east, settling the shores of the Baltic as far west as Holstein. Even the population of Hanover and western Holstein was "Saxon" (i.e., Anglo-Saxon, English) in name only; in reality the German language was seeping in from Hessians and other tribes farther to the south, so that when we speak of "Saxons" in the Middle Ages we mean not an English, but a Low German people.

Thus sharp boundaries of language had been drawn around the North, and at the same time the unrest in central Europe had cut off the ancient connections with the South. There had once been physical contact with the Roman-Germanic civilization; now the bridge had been broken, and the North was thrown on its own resources.

In the matter of language this isolation produced a closer union among all the tribes between the Baltic

coast and the Arctic. Already the oldest runic inscriptions (about 400 A.D.) show an incipient Old Norse quality (the "primitive" Norse language). The process runs on with remarkable speed, and even more remarkable is the fact that all the races of the North kept pace in the linguistic transformation. In this way the Old Norse language of the Viking Age, with its distinct character, its richness of forms and difficult combinations of sounds, was formed.

In many other respects, too, these centuries in which the Northman, cut off from association with the outside world, turned his attention inward, constituted a remarkable period. Formerly he had played the part of an onlooker while Roman civilization penetrated Germanic territory; now the curtain had been drawn, and he was for a time excluded from the great drama of kindred peoples who assimilated Christianity and adapted themselves to new forms of culture. In certain respects the Northman became a barbarian again. The stately chieftain in his Romanized garb was transformed back into a long-bearded viking; his Damascene blade was replaced by a heavy sword of iron or a "troll" of a battle axe; he wished not to be buried in a coffin in the southern fashion, but again piled up a mound of earth over the dead, as did his ancient forefathers. He was like the legendary hero Sinfjötli, who when ten years old was sent out into the forest to live as a wolf in order that he might be hardened for the great deed that awaited

him. In the same manner the Northman was thrown back upon his own rude nature. He tried his strength against the sea, hunted seals and whales, caught small fish and large fish, went up on the mountain heights after reindeer or after Lapp tribute or cleared his forest—and dreamed his long heavy winter dream.

Yet even the outlaw knows what is going on in town. The Northman, in the youthful period of his race, was not entirely cut off from what was happening in other countries. Though merchants might not like to journey along his desolate roads, the lonely warrior who sought a powerful liege lord fared there; or a whole host of people, warriors with women, children, and thralls, would penetrate the land in their search for better living conditions, as did the Heruli who passed through Denmark in 512 A.D. and settled in the land of the Gautar. But such travelers brought with them the foreign spirit in its most warlike and barbarous form: the love of glory and the lays of heroes which did not conflict but rather agreed with the form of life that had now become prevalent. As the period of the Migration of Nations drew to a close, however, intercourse with the South was further blocked. Then the energies of the Northman sought new outlets in campaigns to the east and to the west against barbarous tribes, until—with the beginning of the ninth century—his strength had been fully developed and he could venture upon the conflict with the great civilized nations.

But before we consider how the Northman developed his personality in the great period of expansion called the Viking Age, and how this contact with foreigners affected him, we must dwell a little more in detail on the general nature of the population in the Scandinavian North at that time.

Considered from the point of view of language, the people were essentially a unit from the Eider and the Baltic to Helgoland and the Gulf of Finland. They were a branch of the Gothic race with noticeable Scandinavian traits, although the sharp distinction between them and their southern relatives arose only in the course of time, and although the linguistic differences within the North itself were undoubtedly greater than the runic inscriptions would lead us to imagine.

Common to all were the essential features of the social structure: a peasantry consisting of people who were first and foremost tillers of the soil, and who exercised their political power in the local district *things* as well as in the larger provincial or folk things; furthermore, a class of chieftains including men of more warlike tendencies from the king down to the richer peasants; and, finally, a more or less numerous class of thralls who as servants and tenant farmers contributed to the support of the chieftain and sometimes also the peasant. Common to all were the outer forms of civilization, and common above all was the entire view of life, the warlike mood, the

soul in tension. Courage in danger, fearlessness even in the face of certain death, patience in tribulation, these were the virtues most esteemed by the people. Consideration for the opinion of one's fellows, love of the fame that was to outlive the hero, were the natural outgrowth of warlike conditions, particularly among the members of the close-knit body that constituted a chieftain's retinue, but admiration for bravery and hardihood seems just as strongly marked in tribes which in the far north had to fight against the harshness of nature on land and sea. There was a hard, reserved, taciturn, resolute strain in the people. The veneration of will power, the praise of intelligence, and the determined suppression of all marks of feeling were dominant traits. "The Danes can neither weep over their sins nor over their dead," says Adam of Bremen, the first Christian to describe the North.

When we speak of the Northmen of that day as carrying a common stamp, as being tuned in the same key, we must nevertheless add that the North also embraced more and profounder contrasts than the written sources commonly report. The national types that exist to this day would indicate that the Scandinavians were not all of common origin but belonged to different races, and no doubt these contrasts were more distinct a thousand or two thousand years ago than they are to-day. Probably the investigators are correct who regard the population as con-

sisting of two sharply differentiated races. One type is tall of stature, with ruddy skin, blue eyes, usually light hair, longish face, and longish skull. The other is lower of stature, usually with black or brown hair, brown eyes, dark complexion, broad face, and short round skull. The dolichocephalic type is found purest among the peasants of the interior, whom we usually designate as being of Northern or Scandinavian type. The brachycephalic is most numerous in coastal regions, thus in Norway along almost the entire west coast, and in Denmark chiefly on the islands. Even in ancient times the two types had attracted attention. The Song of Rig, which has come down to us from antiquity, describes the jarl's son and the peasant's son with their light hair, their shining cheeks, and their sharp eyes, contrasting them with the thrall who is "black" with an "ugly" (that is a broad) face.

The contrast between master and thrall does not entirely coincide with that between the fair and the dark race, however. The Icelandic saga literature shows us that many of the most common brachycephalic traits could be found among the scions of chieftains. It is more likely that we are here confronted with a racial difference of extremely ancient origin. The dolichocephalic population was a peasant folk of Aryan race, which made its way to the open forest lands where it could clear fields and graze cattle. The brachycephalic type corresponds more or less to a still older hunting and fishing folk which

in certain border regions had succeeded in maintaining itself pure, but which, when in contact with the Aryans as their thralls or servants, had been absorbed by them.

It would appear that certain qualities of mind have from the earliest ages been connected with these racial types. The dolichocephalic is intelligent and strong-willed. He cannot be easily discomposed. His enjoyments are simple and sensuous. Though he can exert himself intensely at times, he also enjoys the relaxation of the long winter rest with its liberal indulgence of food and drink. The brachycephalic is more of a drudge, persevering in work but petty in his way of thinking, easily breaking down in the face of an unforeseen situation, but firmly attached to hereditary customs. He therefore finds it difficult to rally round the larger issues of the community as a whole, or to lay far-reaching plans, although he is often quick to see and understand. He is predisposed to envy, to melancholy brooding, and to religious emotion, and he has often a gift for poetry and music. In short, he is a man of moods, but the basic color of his temperament is sometimes darker, sometimes lighter, varying in the different regions of the North.

The dolichocephalic type as described by students of folk life in our day corresponds remarkably to the descriptions by foreign authors of the Northmen in the Viking Age, when they hurled themselves upon distant lands as vikings or as merchants, and absorbed

the wealth of the people wherever they came. And even the ideal of antiquity was preponderantly identical with this type, possibly because a single tribe—presumably the ancient Aryan-Gothic nucleus of the race—had put its stamp on the life of the race, or had at least made its own type the ideal and endowed it with a certain authority. The brachycephalic type was in ancient times hardly regarded as more than the type of the thrall. These racial differences do not, however, seem to have involved any political or national opposition at the close of the ancient period; but there was a latent tension, a union of dissimilar mental qualities whose blending and interaction included every possibility of future development.

There were other strong contrasts in the ancient Northland, in spite of its common language. The Danes who lived on their plains were different from the Norwegians living among mountains. Inhabitants of the interior, such as the Gautar in Sweden and the people in East Norway, were different from the coast dwellers in West Norway and in Denmark. There was land that had been under cultivation from prehistoric times, as in Denmark where ancient cairns and barrows rose above the peasant's field; and there was wild and untouched nature, as in Norway where in many places—in the far north or in the high mountains—the country had not been settled until the Iron Age or even the Viking Age. There were villages with a sort of communal operation in large

sections of Denmark and Sweden, where the people formed habits of living together and working together, and there were isolated homesteads far up in the Norwegian valleys which developed a sense of independence sometimes exaggerated into a too overweening self-confidence. There were class differences between the West Norwegian chieftain who sent his dark-haired servants out to catch herring or hunt seals while he himself ventured forth as a viking or to fight the Lapps, and the less pretentious agriculturist of Tröndelag or Gudbrandsdal; and in Denmark there was a similar distinction between the lords of the islands and the plain peasants of West Jutland. There was no lack of contrast, no lack of possibilities for conflict and blending, and at the same time these local peculiarities were widespread enough to enable broader national characteristics to develop.

WHEN, in spite of all these differences, the Northmen of the Viking Age appear with such a uniform language and uniform culture, it was chiefly due to the numerous homes of chieftains that were scattered over the lands. The chieftains united aristocratic birth and great wealth in land with the political leadership of a district. There were kings, great and small, and jarls—these were *beidverdir menn, tignarmenn* (men of honor, men of rank). In addition there were *hersar*, peasant chieftains for a smaller district, who made their influence felt as speakers at the things, as

godar (sacrificial priests) for their community (for a special class of priests is hardly known outside of the sanctuary at Uppsala), as military leaders, but particularly by means of the warrior retinue they always kept with them.

The names of this band vary: "friends," "followers," "home-takers," "sword-takers," "housecarls," "*inndrott*" (houseband), "*verdung*" (guard), etc. Toward the end of the Viking Age, the designation *hird*, borrowed from the Anglo-Saxon, became the most common. These sworn followers, who were obliged to give their lives for their master if need be, had many centuries of tradition behind them, but with the rise of the royal power, the expansion of the military life, and the dissemination of gold, the *hird* grew in prestige and was surrounded by a new glamour. Many a well-born young man considered it an honor to serve a mightier chieftain until he should be able to take his place in the ancestral high-seat in his own home. Not least important was the fact that poets would go from one to another of the chieftains' halls, sometimes as guests, more often as members of the *hird;* and whatever the poet would compose in honor of a contemporary ruler or whatever he would sing of the remote life of heroes, the images and views current in the chieftain's hall would color his poem and thus be disseminated in wider circles. When Thormod Kolbrunarskald before the battle of Stiklestad, in 1030, was asked to sing for the entire

army of Saint Olaf, he sang the lay of King Hrólf and his housecarls, the ancient Bjarkamál.

Let us cast a glance into a chieftain's hall of the time, a spacious timber building, constructed to accommodate hundreds of persons. We enter by the front door, passing thralls who are carrying out the remains of the feast and others who are dragging in wood for the fires; a swarm of wayfaring folk and beggars are congregated close to the entrance to assure themselves of some morsels of food. It may be difficult to get into the hall. The long fires in the center of the floor prevent a complete view of the women's benches under the opposite gable; over the sooty roof beams the smoke hangs thick before it finds an outlet through the openings above. But it is an easy matter to see the long benches where the men sit close together, their weapons hanging above their heads on the wall; between the carved high-seat posts (a kind of fetish-like talisman), we see the raised seat of the chieftain. Over by the fire his daughter goes about drawing ale from the barrel and offering the horn to the warriors; there is drink and talk, noise and merriment, which is interrupted by the poet, striking the strings for a song of some ancient legend or of their king: "Hear, oh ye ring-bearers! while I speak of Harald, and the spear-deeds of the rich ruler." The skald has ceased, and the king is pleased. He removes his golden bracelet and hands it to the skald; and in high good humor he causes weapons to

be brought from the chamber, foreign tribute and ancient heirlooms; to one he gives a sword, to another a byrnie and helmet; he hews pieces from his gold rings and distributes them. Then the men rise, warm with ale and gifts, and thank him loudly, and swear with raised hands to follow him to the death, and to risk their lives to avenge him. Brave, strong words are heard often in the hall, and also wise counsel to prepare for future prowess, while many ask news of foreign parts. New ideas, coming from foreign lands, make their first appearance here; and memories of ancient times, as we now know them, show signs of having passed through the hall of the chieftain and his retinue.

THE second most important factor of the age was the peasant, the free land-owning man. He differed from the chieftain's man in that he was not bound to any individual but to a wider community. The nation or tribe was from time immemorial a group of land-holding men who defended themselves as a mass and who gathered armed for common deliberation in the *thing*. Judgment was given by the entire tribe of peasants; the malefactor was declared an "outlaw," beyond the protection of the law or the sanction of society.

The peasant thing continued to exist, even after larger state formations had superseded the tribal unit, and it became the principal organization through

which the peasant came in contact with the wider social interests. As the attendance increased, larger thing gatherings were instituted, which did not always coincide with the military-political state. It seemed to be a general rule that where the tribe gathered at a sacrificial place, a thingstead grew up; cases were discussed, quarrels were adjusted, until gradually the once merely occasional meeting developed into a fixed legislative institution. This may be seen in so late an example as the settlement of Iceland. The settlers established a thing wherever a private individual built a sacrificial place, and the *godi,* or priest, was the self-appointed thing leader; yet the Althing, common to all Iceland, was founded so late that it stands outside this normal development. On the other hand, such names as those of the Danish land things suggest a religious origin. Lund in Skåne; Ringstedlund or Tislund (*Tir's* Grove, West Nordic *Tyr*) in Zealand; Viborg (or, by its original name, *Vidbjærg,* sanctuary mountain) in Jutland. We cannot prove any of these places to have been a political center for any tribe; Viborg, for instance, lies in a district in which four older tribes overlapped. In all cases, among the Germanic tribes, the sacrificial assemblies and thing gatherings came first and paved the way for political union; on the other hand, these "lands" and "land things" became an obstacle to the evolution of the larger unity of the realm. The peas-

ant race advanced cautiously, but its feeling of unity was all the stronger.

It was not the entire peasant community, however, which was the strongest support of the individual in the difficult situations of life; it was a much narrower circle, namely, the kin. To avenge a loss that had been suffered, the whole kindred took up arms, and had to answer for the acts of any one of their relatives, with their lives, if necessary; fines for manslaughter or mutilation were distributed among members of the family, and similarly the family received compensation for the loss suffered by any individual. The more important decisions were matters that concerned all. If a man wished to make an illegitimate son his rightful heir, not only the individual himself, but his entire kin was obliged to "lead him into the kin." "Then shall he make a banquet with three casks of ale, and slaughter a three-year-old ox and flay the skin from its right foreleg and make a shoe thereof and set it by the side of the ale tankard; then shall he first step into the shoe who leads the man into the kin, then he who is to be led into the kin, then he who has granted him the conditions of heirship, and then he that has granted the allodial law, and then all the other kin." Norse peasant customs still show this strong desire to cling to the kin. Even in modern times, when the tribe meets for a banquet, "careful attention is paid to having the kinsfolk honored with the proper title of their relationship"; they speak most

of the forefathers' great feats and deeds of prowess, and the narration betrays the same uncanny acquaintance with the ramifications of lineage as is found in the ancient sagas; a Norwegian peasant woman, of Tröndelag, could describe her family relationship with 124 persons. Certain families have been in the habit of holding an annual meeting—an assembly under the open sky—in which the young people were introduced to the kinsmen.

The ancient home was not a family home in the present sense. In a remote Tröndelag settlement, Tydal, the farmstead was until recently a community of from twenty to thirty persons, who "ate from the same bag and drank from the same cup"; a group of adult married kindred with their children, and a grandfather sitting behind the stove, who had charge of the running of the farm and looked after the common purse. In Bergtorshvál, in Iceland, according to Njálssaga, there lived old Njál and his wife with three married sons and a son-in-law, not counting bondmen, children, and decrepit persons, altogether about half a hundred people. Under such circumstances the home was felt to be the home of the larger family; men lived on holdings that their forefathers had lived on perhaps for centuries; and every one knew who had erected each building and brought each object into the house. The entrance into the life beyond was often pictured as a removal to the hall where the forefathers now had

their seat; at times this place was imagined quite near the earthly dwelling. At Thorsnæs in western Iceland it was believed that the dead went to Helgafell. One autumn evening the herdsman went out and saw the mountainside open; there was a great fire and the sound of many voices of men; he heard how Thorstein was being welcomed and shown to the place of honor opposite his father, Thorolf Mosterskæg. Next morning a messenger came to the farmyard to announce that Thorstein had been drowned while fishing. A special form of family relationship was that in which one newly deceased was reborn in his descendants, and the latter were accordingly given the name of the deceased. This belief appears as late as the period of the Migrations, first among the East Goths, from whom it spread far and wide; in the North it was introduced in the seventh or eighth century, a period at which the general tribal relationship of ancient days had already begun to loosen. It continued to exist as a current folk belief for many centuries. "We shall come again," said the old people in Sætersdal when death called them from the ancestral home.

In ancient times the connection between the race and the farmstead had been even closer. There was then no private ownership of land, except for the land a man had cleared for himself; as soon as it passed over to his descendants, it belonged to the family. When the first houses could no longer hold

more inhabitants, new homes were built to one side, and the growing flock obtained its sustenance by a common—or a partially common—cultivation of the soil. A peculiar group of place names, those ending in *-inge* or *-unge*, recalls this condition; they are commonly derived from names of persons. Let us take as an example the country town of Ravning in the Jælling district. The first inhabitant was named Ravn, and while he was alive, the place was called "At Ravn's"; after him, his descendants, the "Ravnings," lived there, and the place is then called "At the Ravnings" (Hrafnungum). This is the reason for the plural form of such place names in the ancient language; they designate from the outset a society of several persons that lived there. A specific member of this society, for instance, may be called Hrafnunga-Tóki, a name which occurs on a number of runic stones in the district. In Denmark and Sweden, as well as among kindred races to the south, hundreds of these traces may be found, the oldest place names that we know formed from personal names. In the period of the Migrations there arose a corresponding group—principally in Denmark—ending in *-lev* (heritage). A name like Utterslev therefore means the estate once belonging to Ottar and now worked by his heirs. But even before the Viking Age these communal names were no longer the expression of a living custom. At the same time we encounter names ending in *-sted*, or *-stad*, meaning a single large

chieftain's home, to which later are added *-torp* and *-röd,* meaning a new home or clearing; but also these single farmsteads often develop in the course of time into villages. On the other hand the type of names ending in *-by,* found mostly in eastern Scandinavia, appear to have had their origin from a small group working on a communal plan.

At the earliest stage the land was the property of the clan, or group, and the individual could collect his share only by living on the land and taking part in its cultivation. When we reach the Viking Age, individual holdings had become the rule; but the land could be inherited only by sons, not by daughters, and the family were reluctant to parcel it out. The rights of the kin were now pushed into the background, but if the owner wished to sell, his kinsmen had the first refusal; they had the "allodial" right, as it is still called in Norway. Gross mismanagement might lead to the dispossession of the owner, who was then succeeded by his next of kin.

At the beginning of the Viking Age, the independent peasant living on the land of his fathers was therefore the main type of the time. We are not aware to what extent military upheavals and the rising power of kings, with their right to seize forfeited or masterless property, had already begun to change this condition; nor do we know whether the great quantities of gold brought by the Migration of Nations transformed the ancient allodial land to pur-

chasable land. In the Viking Age this process was going on apace, but it was not until the Middle Ages, when the right of female inheritance and the right to bequeath property were established, that the ancient form of ownership passed away.

The peasant of the Viking Age was a freeholder, and his mode of thought was shaped by this condition. The defiant independence and the stern sense of honor which were ancient traits of his race were enhanced where he ruled as a king over his land, and were most marked in regions where farmsteads were scattered and isolated, but less pronounced in districts where property rights consisted in claims on a certain share of the common output or yield of a village. Surrounding the individual there was a protecting layer of neighbors, friends, kinsmen, and sons- or brothers-in-law—a group of persons who had emerged from the ancient clan society and were permeated with its basic principle of loyalty to kinsfolk. The rules of wisdom in the Hávamál continually inculcate the fact that a tree crumbles if it stands alone without the shelter of other trees, and there are no end of directions as to how one may best win and retain friends: why should the man live whom no one loves?

This peasant society, though numerically large, did not have a great influence on the intellectual life of the people, for it was not precisely the anvil on which new thoughts were forged. Its chief contributions to

literature were paragraphs of the law pronounced at the things, and alliterative verse containing rules of conduct illustrated by striking examples. To this may be added a certain domestic industry of skaldic verse and—as a late but brilliant exception, called forth by special conditions—the Icelandic sagas. But even if the direct contribution is not large, we shall find, when we look more closely, that the peasant life, with its pride, its consciousness of racial continuity, and its faithful adherence to those next of kin, is at the very foundation of the entire culture of the people. Even if the contribution of the chieftain's hall is the first and most noticeable, a deeper study will soon reveal the figure of the peasant rising from it.

II. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MYTH

THE myth is the oldest of the monuments of antiquity. The child-like mind of primitive man conceived of all things in nature as living creatures; every object called forth conjectures as to the person or event that had given rise to it, and such tales were handed down from generation to generation for purposes either of entertainment or instruction. Involuntarily, new threads were woven into the motley cloth; the ancient picture was overlaid with a web in new, fresh colors; and, finally, the original texture shone forth only in spots, or was perhaps entirely obscured. Thus the material changed by imperceptible degrees from early times when the whole world was, so to speak, a myth, through epochs in which the great phenomena of the heavens were regarded as the chief divinities, down to the time when the myths were committed to writing, with their origin in natural phenomena sloughed off, while more personal divinities were worshiped.

It is in the last named form that we know the myths, as they are recorded in the collection of lays from the Viking Age known as the Elder Edda and in the mythical tales which we call the Younger Edda [1] or Snorri's Edda, as well as in the skaldic verse and the sagas. Yet the myths preserve many traits of their earliest childhood, as for instance in their curious

One of Two Great Golden Drinking Horns Found in the Ground at Gallehus, Jutland, Thought to Date from about 500 A.D. *and Decorated with Mythical Figures.*

mixture of the small and the great; they tell us at once why the whole world shakes with the writhings of the fettered Loki—and why the salmon is narrow at the tail. Furthermore, their entire group of ideas is a reflection of a very primitive social structure. The gods constitute a petty tribe which aims to get the better of another tribe, the Giants, by means of combat or—more often—by cunning. They steal chattels

[1] The Elder Edda is known also as The Poetic Edda; the Younger Edda, as The Prose Edda. Under these titles they have been translated into English, the former by Henry Adams Bellows, the latter by Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur, American-Scandinavian Foundation, New York.

or women from each other, and get them back by conquest; they fight for precedence at river fords, and harry each other's lands very much as two tribes of savages might do to-day.

The individual myths themselves are a heritage from remote ancestors, as for example the myth of the stolen drink. Many primitive tribes have tales concerning a great frog or serpent who has swallowed all the water and withholds it from other creatures until forced by some cunning hero to yield it up again. The animal is later developed into a monster who keeps the water vessels hidden in his cave. But in the course of time this tale begins to be regarded as childish. Then the water is transformed into the divine mead which a god in the guise of a falcon has dragged forth from the giant's glen. This is the form in which the myth appears in the Hindu Vedic lays, as well as in the Northern myths concerning the skald's mead.

Another mythic motive is that of two cliffs which strike together. Not infrequently we find savage tribes who believe that at the end of the earth there is a portal formed by two cliffs which are continually opening and shutting. Every evening, when the sun disappears in the west, they believe that it has slipped out through the gate, and they also think that the way to the world of the dead leads through this portal. But the time comes when the faith in a visible and permanent gate on an open road loses its hold, and

then the whole tale is shifted to the world of mythic lore. Then we have—as with the Greeks—the colliding cliffs between which Jason steers his ship on his way to the land of treasure, or—as in the Northerner's version—an opening and closing Hnitbjörg, where the daughter of Suttung guards the casks of mead, only to be beguiled by Odin, who appears in the guise of an eagle or a serpent, into handing him the drink. In this manner the ancient mythic motives are consolidated and interwoven. We must always remember that the legends in the form in which they have come down to us are the result of a thousand years of story-telling, in which the tales passed from mouth to mouth. No single explanation will open the gate to all the myths; every age has added to them and has put into them something of its own spirit.

The extent of this transformation may best be seen from the fact that what was once a natural phenomenon manifested in a divinity later appears changed into a poetic characterization of the individual god, either physically or spiritually. Thor no longer drives a chariot in his combat with the Giants, but fights standing up; his hammer is less often hurled as a thunderbolt than employed for dealing direct blows. Odin, who was originally associated with a natural phenomenon—the roaring nocturnal rout through desolate plains—no doubt retains his spear, his retinue of wolves, and his swift eight-footed steed, but these things are now merely his stage properties

when he appears at Valhalla, while his cloak and his low-hanging hat are transformed into his disguise when he fares among men. The common people still believe there is a connection between the sheet lightning in the air and Loki, but when his blond head appears at the banquet of the Asir, he is a personality and nothing more.

But this mythic poetry which we encounter in the Viking Age, with its wealth of sharply defined individual characters and its rapid succession of splendid scenes, has also evolved a unified conception of the world order, a definite philosophy. The world holds naught—so the myth teaches—that can be enjoyed without a struggle, not an indiscriminate fighting of all against all, but a combat between the forces that would preserve human life and all that is of value to it, and those that would destroy these things: between the Asir and the Giants.

The struggle with the Giants becomes the sole dominant theme for the mythic poets of the Viking Age. The world is maintained only by means of a struggle in which the power and ingenuity of the Asir are constantly put to the test. Thor is engaged in repeated journeys in search of aid to match against the numerical superiority of the Giants. Odin fares forth disguised in order to trap the cunning Giant Vafthrudnir and to acquire by secret means the clever devices that will give him strength; he learns wisdom from one; he entices the maid who guards the mead

of Suttung to deliver it to him; he obtains by stealth the love from which an avenger of the gods shall spring; he engages in a life and death contest of wits with the Giant; or he summons the dead Wise Woman of the Giants from her grave and forces from her lips her prophecies.

This philosophy is best expressed in the image of the world-ash, Yggdrasil: existence is a continuum, an organism. Its living force is concentrated in the tree Yggdrasil. The crown of the tree is in the sky; its three roots are, one among men, one among the Giants, and one in Hel. The dew that drips from it supports the life of nature, but the tree is also the scene of the councils of the gods, and at its base flows the spring of Urd, whence emerge the maids of fate, the Norns. The idea of a tree is found in the myths or poems of other races; Homer sings of the human race as a tree whose leaves are steadily falling but are constantly replenished. The Northern world-tree involves also the idea of suffering and striving. "The ash Yggdrasil suffers more than men know; the hart eats of its crown; on one side it decays, and Nidhugg gnaws its roots," but the Norns water it from the spring, and "it stands ever green over Urd's well."

The overwhelming energy released in this eternal struggle corresponds to something in the character of the Scandinavian—perhaps in the whole Germanic race: a tendency to dualism, often with a distinct ethical emphasis. Thus, in the world of gods, we have

the Asir fighting against the Giants; in the world of heroes, the noble against the churl. His mind is too childlike to appreciate the nuances of existence, too deep to overlook the great contrasts of life or to ignore its profound wretchedness.

How strongly this contrast is felt is shown by the myths concerning the end of the world, the Ragnarök, or ultimate fate of the gods, as the Northmen call it: belief in a Fimbul Winter or in the sinking of the lands into the sea; in the swallowing of the sun by one of the constantly pursuing wolves; in the coming tremendous battle between gods and Giants, when the gods—the great gods whom the people regard as holy—shall succumb in the struggle. But they do not die unavenged, for that is something no Northman could imagine. Vídar, the young son of Odin, tears apart the jaws of the Fenris wolf, and makes possible the beginning of a new race of gods and men who will continue the forms of life. The life force is rescued from destruction, though barely, and only after a desperate struggle.

The world struggle between gods and Giants is not an exclusively Northern theme. In fact, it is common to all the Aryan peoples; they all conceive of a thunderer who leads the rest of the divine host in a daily struggle against the monsters. The Celts even have a story of one tremendous battle of the gods which has something of the same tragic element as the Northern version. While the Hellene and the Hindu abandon

this idea—by reason either of a joy in life or a renunciation of life—the Northman carries it out to its ultimate consequences. The closest parallel to his conception is found in the Persian race, which teaches a constant struggle between good spirits and monsters. But this very similarity serves to emphasize the difference. Based from the very outset upon the contrast between fruitfulness and drought, and always engaging human beings as active workers, the Persian legend is a religion that has arisen among people who guard their flocks or till the soil. The world combat of the Northmen is the outcome in part of war and in part of melancholy brooding over the conditions of life. The Northern version acknowledges far less the place of men as co-workers with the gods; living men do not participate in the Ragnarök battle, but only the warriors who have been gathered to Valhalla after death. The doctrine of the Persians contains something of the bright faith of toiling man that his efforts shall prevail; the lays of the Northmen reveal only the brooder's dream that all shall be destroyed.

The poetry of the Viking Age, as we have it in the Norwegian lays of the ninth and still more of the tenth century, is colored by this mood of gloom. In the midst of brilliant scenes, often where we least expect it, we hear the undertones of a Ragnarök, a reminder of the hour when Odin shall meet the wolf, and the sons of Muspel shall ride through the dark forest. Something of this may be merely the art of

the poet who desires to have the gay scenes of the myths appear the brighter against a dark background, a tendency that we shall meet again in the lays of heroes. But side by side with the myths concerning the great world drama, we shall find other myths not associated with it, but which nevertheless allow their characters to be tried in conflicts and situations of the most varied kind—though with a happy outcome. Thus Thor shatters the stone head of the Giant Hrungnir with his hammer Mjölnir; or, disguised as a bride, he recovers his lost hammer from the king of the Thursis. But there was one myth that the skalds esteemed higher than all others; they never tired of recounting how Thor with his fishhook drew the Midgard serpent itself out of the ocean, how the spotted venomous creature stared with hatred in its eyes at its mortal enemy, while heavy blows were showered upon its head. This myth remained the great and adequate expression of the struggle between the destructive and constructive forces. The ancient lay of the divine hero has no jubilant notes like the Christian's song on Easter morn; it speaks only of gloomy and dogged resolution.

The richly endowed poets of the Viking Age developed the theme of the gigantic struggle to its highest possibilities; but essential features of it can be traced in the beliefs of the common man, beliefs that have remained in his mind as a sort of permanent undergrowth while the tall trees have risen and been

felled and others have risen again. The thunderbolt crashes through the air like a giant or an old man driving a chariot. It is preceded by short, sharp gusts of wind; these are the trolls who are running away to save their lives. Sometimes they may be seen in the shape of blazing snarls of yarn (ball lightning, electrical discharges) darting straight across the road or along the roof-tree to find a shelter; but the old man in his chariot keeps his eye on them and hurls his thunderbolt which strikes right through them and buries itself in the ground. Or, in autumn nights, at the time when the gray goose, the heron, and other birds of passage are on the wing, one may hear curious sounds like the barking or howling of dogs in the dark and silent forests. This is "Oden," "Un," pursuing forest maids, elf-hags, or—in coastal regions—mermaids. Stories are told of how they flee before him, gigantic in size, with hair wildly waving, their long breasts flapping over their shoulders, as he gallops forth on his high horse, spear in hand, and a slain sorceress hanging over his saddle as booty of the chase. So "King Oden" will hunt as long as the world stands, or until the last forest woman is slain, the thunderbolt helping him to exterminate them.

Though there may be much of an Aryan heritage, and still more of a common Germanic principle, in this struggle of the gods with trolls, we nevertheless find a definitely Northern formulation of the idea. Popular superstitions show that, even among the Ger-

manic tribes who are closely related to the Scandinavian, "der wilde Jäger" does not, like the Northern "Oden," develop into a warrior who protects men; rather, it is pity for the hunted forest women that is the predominant feeling. Within the Scandinavian North, Denmark and still more Sweden presented the richest growth of legends concerning the troll-killing thunder and the hunting "Oden"; yet the mighty songs of the Viking period show that Norway did not lag behind in the construction of such stories.

Even though the great mass of legendary tales do nothing but repeat again and again the great conflict, the struggle between the gods and the trolls, there is nevertheless an incipient tendency to shape the entire story into a connected action, the drama of the gods; Ragnarök is thus necessarily made the center of gravity of the whole. We have such a mythological story in the first of the songs of the Elder Edda, the Völuspá, but we must postpone our consideration of this remarkable poem to another chapter. Among the more general, impersonal mythological stories we have a single myth which is attuned to the Ragnarök mood, the myth of Balder's death.

Balder's death is regarded by many as the central point in the myth-world of the Northmen, but this cannot be maintained of the myth in the form in which I shall relate it. For the Balder myth is by no means the hub about which the mass of myths revolve, and the Balder story itself differs considerably

RUNE STONE
from Tjängvide, Gotland, showing Odin on his horse Sleipner, riding to Valhalla

DESIGN ON THE GOSFORTH CROSS,
Northumbria, showing Vídar rending the jaws of the Fenris Wolf

in the various traditions; in fact it revolves around several different hubs. The epic kernel of the Balder myth is an ancient heroic theme which we find also in the Persian lay of Sohrab and Rustum as well as elsewhere. It deals with a hero of divine birth, or at least under divine protection, who can be slain only by one means, which his adversary succeeds in learning; he finds a twig, makes of it an arrow, and with that slays the son of god. In one of the Northern forms the problem is complicated by the fact that the murderer is one of the divine tribe; the gods cannot wreak vengeance, for they are all of the same clan and allied with the murderer. Thereupon Odin in disguise visits the maiden Rind; he wins her love by his arts of sorcery, and a son is born to them who, without doing violence to any oath, can wreak vengeance for Balder's death by slaying Hödr. The principal element in this myth is Odin's craftiness in twisting conditions so that they may further his own plans. In the other Balder myth the main point is not Hödr and revenge, but Loki and suffering. It is Loki who fashions the mistletoe into a weapon which he places in the hands of the blind Hödr who then unwittingly slays Balder; and when all nature weeps for the restoration of the noble one, Loki sits weeping "waterless tears" in Thökk's cave, the only creature unmoved, and permits Hel to hold her prey. Innocence that is ignorant of slaughter or evil, sorrow so deep that no vengeance can assuage it, and wickedness of diabolical

intensity, impart to this Balder legend a different fundamental tone from that of the ordinary battle myths. Small wonder that this poem was so popular among the Christian Northmen in the West during the Viking Age, and that it retained its popularity in Iceland and other places far down into the late Middle Ages. The sorrow and wretchedness of the world, the power of evil, the suffering of the divine hero which can melt the hardest heart, find their first expression here. This legend about Balder does not date from the earliest period of our paganism, but is its last word, when the lamentations for the suffering Christ are already echoing in the air.

Loki is the most curious figure in our mythic world. It is impossible to banish him, for he is ubiquitous, but to a certain extent we can distinguish historically the strata in which the myths concerning him have been deposited. Loki as Thor's companion is of ancient origin, for everywhere in the North European world of myth the thunder god has a youthful companion as his assistant and messenger, one who is sometimes crafty in the struggle with the Giants, but at other times is outwitted and must be delivered by the more powerful god; and the material in these myths is always the same as that in the Northern stories, such as the capture of the gigantic fish and the recovery of Thor's lost hammer. Of the same type is the group of myths in which Loki appears as the companion of Odin, always as an enterprising fellow

who now conquers by his cunning, and now gets himself into the power of the trolls by his own lack of caution. On the other hand, there are elements in the figure of Loki that point in a different direction. He lies fettered in the cave with the drops of venom falling on his face from the mouth of the serpent; he writhes so that the earth shakes, and on the day of Ragnarök he will burst forth as an enemy of the gods. Epically this is connected not so much with the Christian Lucifer as with the legends from the Caucasus of the hero confined in the Elbrus, his fetters, his torments, and his burst to freedom at the end of the world. But when all these conceptions could unite and form a whole, it was because a change was taking place in the entire world of Northern myth.

It is obvious that something is working its way forward in the mythic conceptions of the North. There is a tendency to underscore the individuality of the various gods, also to give an impression of godlike power, and finally—though in lesser degree—to purify the images of the gods in an ethical sense. The victories won by the thunder god through cunning are softened down, while the epic motives still show what a large part these tricks formerly played. The drawing ashore of the giant fish, for example, has lost the emphasis on Thor's cunning and devotes all its attention to the depiction of his great strength. In the recovery of the hammer, again, all the trickery

is assigned to Thor's companion, Loki. Under these circumstances Loki must bear the blame for all the misfortunes and disgrace that come upon the Asir. He slips down from the level of the gods and is represented as the offspring of the race of Giants; in the beginning of time, it is said, he has mingled his blood with that of Odin.

During the Viking Age a transmutation of values is taking place in the Northern world. Two spiritual currents of different nature proceed side by side. The naïve myth that somewhat resembles a fairy tale, telling of gods transformed into animals, etc., can be found in the stories of the Younger Edda and in the elaborate skaldic songs which aim only to present traditional material in a splendid external dress. But in the lays of gods in the Elder Edda we have poetic compositions in which men of a high mental development have put their impress on the world of myths. The very fact that all stories about gods taking on the forms of animals have been removed or suppressed is significant. No attention is paid to an Odin who flies in the guise of an eagle through the cleft in the Hnitbjörg or who crawls to the mead in the shape of a serpent. Instead, Odin makes his appearance as a crafty politician and intriguer; he secures admission to Suttung's hall by posing as a suitor to Suttung's daughter, holds his marriage feast among the Giants, and slips off during the bridal night with the aid of the faithful and loving Gunlad; and the

next day the Giants go about and ask concerning him who has thus disappeared, whether he succeeded in escaping to the gods alive, or whether Suttung has slain him. Then Odin rejoices aloud: Suttung he has deceived, and Suttung's daughter he has left to her weeping, but the mead of poetry has been won from the depths to the great good of gods and men.

III. WORSHIP OF THE GODS

IF a Christian had visited the great sanctuary of the North at Uppsala, in the ninth, tenth, or even during a considerable portion of the eleventh century, he would have witnessed much that must have impressed him as peculiar and repulsive. Entering the sacred grove, he would have seen hanging from the trees the many sacrifices that had been offered to the gods—horses, dogs, or other animals, even human beings. Within the grove he would have beheld the great sacred tree of which it was said that it was green both in summer and in winter; and on ascending the heights which spread out as a huge amphitheater, he would have seen the temple of the gods straight ahead, a huge building of wood whose gilded adornments gleamed on roof and eaves far over the plain, and whose dark interior housed the wooden images of the gods: Odin, with his spear and armor, Thor with his hammer or scepter, and the coarse representation of Frey, the god of generation. But

if this Christian had attended one of the great festivals that were held every ninth year about the time of the Equinox, he would have found the grounds filled with a great tumult of men. On each of the nine sacrificial days, at least one human being was slaughtered, as well as numerous animals. They were suspended from the trees, impaled with spears, or thrown into the sacred springs in the sacrificial grove, while the priests stood by to observe whether the sacrifice rose or disappeared entirely in the water, for in the latter case the divinities had been delighted with the gift. Wild songs, "of many kinds and unseemly," sounded from the sacrificing multitude; invocations to the gods and a general jubilation accompanied the sacrificial meal. At the close of the days of sacrifice, the assembled thousands would return home, hoping that the gods would now grant prosperity to man and beast, and would stem the power of their enemies and keep diseases from the country. But in the grove hung the remains of the sacrifices; a witness once counted seventy-two corpses in its trees.

Or, let us consider another picture from this period. It is near midwinter night in Tröndelag, in Norway. The peasants gather for the Yule feast at the hall of the powerful Jarl of Lade. This spacious apartment, which is also a temple of the gods, receives hundreds of guests. They arrive on skis and in sleds loaded with casks of ale and birch-bark re-

ceptacles full of foodstuffs, and they lead horses and sheep with them. The fires already blaze along the floor of the hall, and the benches are crowded. The animals are slaughtered before the images of the gods; the blood is gathered in great bowls and placed upon the pedestals of the gods as a first gift to the mighty. The jarl steps forth, takes up the aspergillum, and sprinkles the warm blood about, over the pedestal, over the entire house, over all those present. The bodies are hacked to pieces and cast into the kettles hanging over the fires. The jarl then appears with the drinking horn, which he consecrates to Odin, praying for victory in battle, whereupon he drinks of it himself and hands it to his most honored guest, who also drinks, upon which the horn goes the round from mouth to mouth. Similarly, they drink to Njörd and Frey, for good harvest and peace; then they drink the "Bragi cup"—the cup of the master, the great god Thor. They have now exhausted the toasts in remembrance of the greatest gods. The banquet meat is now distributed; the soup and the fat chunks of flesh are handed round; every man in the house must have his dole, for they are the guests of the gods.

The pagan divine service assumed similar forms everywhere in the North, and the bloodiness and savagery of these customs are fully in accord with the rude impress that stamps the earliest appearance of the Scandinavians. But, in a proper perspective, we

cannot call all this Scandinavian; a certain primitive warlike stage of civilization always presents similar religious forms. Everywhere the friendship of the gods is purchased by gifts; everywhere we have a bloody dismembering of the sacrificial beasts, everywhere the peculiar sanctity attached to that which is consecrated to the gods, so that it is not regarded as blood and carcass, but rather as that which sanctifies the grove, the temple hall, and all individuals who are touched by these things. Human sacrifice also is a part of the divine service as a rule. The gods are powerful and cruel; the race that wishes to preserve its life and prosperity in the future must kill others—thralls or men chosen by lot—rather than be killed itself. If there is anything about all this that may be designated as peculiarly Scandinavian, it is probably the astonishingly small rôle that is played by fire; the ugliness of the sacrifice is not veiled by smoke and flames; its bleak remnants remain visible to all in the trees and springs of the sanctuary, like telltale signs of a nocturnal misdeed revealed by the light of day. An extremely ancient barbarous form of sacrifice thus remained in full force even as late as the Viking Age.

The Scandinavian forms of worship present two distinct strata. One of these is the service performed in the open air, which is the older; the other is the worship of temples and images, which is on the whole later. The invocation of the gods in the deep shad-

ows of the grove, or under the open sky, goes back to the culture of the Bronze Age, perhaps even the Stone Age; the worship of images, on the other hand, begins to develop in our Roman Iron Age. This dualism may be observed even in the sanctuary at Uppsala; nature supplied the sacred grove, the mighty tree, and the spring; man's addition was the temple with the images of the three great gods. The sacrificial usages themselves, being very old, were extremely close to nature; the gift to the gods was hung upon the tree, in order that creatures flying in the air might snatch away the soul at the moment the noose tightened; the sacrifice at the spring was received by the water spirit at the bottom. In the deep shadows of the grove or under the open sky were the spots where primitive man considered it possible to appeal to the divine powers. The bath in the sacred lake, the dance on the hillocks, the sacrificial offering on warriors' mounds, were a part of the service on the great natural feast days, Midsummer Eve, or the driving forth of the cattle in the spring. The custom of casting lots under the open sky to ascertain the will of the gods played a great rôle in the North. It was stubbornly retained as a festal usage even in periods when the presence of the gods was associated with the images in the temple; for it was based on the supposition that the gods could watch the throw of the dice from their heaven. These open air sacrificial customs were passed on from generation to gen-

eration. In many of the narrow valleys of Norway an offering of butter was made to the sun the first day after midwinter when it again shone upon the house-tops. A bit of butter was placed upon the roof, whereupon the sun promptly licked it up. The invocation in this form refers not infrequently to all the divine powers of heaven itself. We are in possession of one such invocation from the period of the Eddic lays: the Valkyrie Sigrdrifa awakes from her deep sleep and, having been roused by Sigurd to a new life, addresses her prayer to the divine powers of all nature: "Hail thee, Day, and hail ye, Sons of Day; hail thee, Night and ye Children of Night! Glance ye with gentle eyes upon us and give us who sit here victory! Hail Asir and Asir-women; hail thee, feeding earth! Grant speech and human wisdom to us two noble ones, and healing hands so long as we live."

The gods are not only helpers to the individual, in so far as he can gain their favor; they are also the bearers of social ideas. The sanctity of the oath is such an idea, as it appears in the oath over a weapon; the warrior walks out into an open field, lays his sword and shield on the ground before him, and prays that, should he break his oath, his weapons may not be his aids, but his ruin. While known among other Germanic peoples, this oath is particularly prominent among the Scandivanians from the period of the oldest records. Throughout the Middle Ages

we find this permanent form of oath: the wanderer swears with his hand on his spear, the horseman with his foot in the stirrup, the skipper on the deck of his boat. The inviolability of the popular assembly, the peace of the grave, and, to a certain extent, the weal of society as a whole are under the protection of the gods.

This attitude to the divine host is expressed also in the giving of names according to the custom common to the Germanic peoples. Masculine and feminine names were made of compounds with *As-* (properly, "creature," "spirit"; later, "gods"), *Gud-* (god, properly, those invoked), *Regin-* or *Ragn-* (divinities). A child was thus placed under the protection of the divine host. But in the North, a new custom began before the Viking Age and continued throughout its course: the child was dedicated to a single god. The Jutish chieftains had a preference for Odin, the Swedish peasants in Uppland, for Frey, but everywhere in the North hundreds of names were formed with compounds of Thor.

In the Viking Age we hear of men who took a single god as their *fulltrúi*, i.e., they placed all their trust in him. Concerning the Swedes, we learn that in distress during battle they called upon one of their many gods and that after obtaining the victory, they worshiped him and set him above the other gods; and that many persons in this manner had learned that the god of the Christians was the strongest and

therefore had clung to him. Such a selection among the gods for special worship must have had a disintegrating effect on the general national religion.

The gods known to have been worshiped in the Viking Age were essentially the following: *Odin,* the god of combat and wisdom; *Thor,* protector against sorcery, disease, and dangers of all kinds, also sometimes the god of agriculture; *Frey,* the god of fruitfulness; *Njörd,* the god of navigation and prosperity, worshiped particularly in coastal regions; *Tyr* (in Denmark and Sweden sometimes *Tir*), the old god of war, in still remoter days, the god of heaven, but now already moving into the background; *Ull,* the ancient chieftain of the gods, whose worship (in Sweden and particularly Norway) had paled before the advance of Odin. *Skadi* was known in the same regions as a special goddess of the chase. The divinity for the life of woman and the home is *Frigg* or *Freya;* sometimes both appear together, accompanied by a host of other goddesses, known either collectively as *dísir* or possessing individuality as feminine divine specialists: one will ward off evil from the door of the house; another protects the art of healing; a third guards the sanctity of oaths, etc. The piety of women seems to have been more attached even than that of men to the traditional, to the host of gods and to the myriads of special gods; also, the women were the bearers of the traditional sacrifices to the specific divine guardians of the individual

household: the sprite who lived on the hearth, the gnome in the splendid thurse-tree in the yard or on the neighboring warrior's mound, or the spirit dwelling in this waterfall or that boulder, to whom gifts had been offered from time immemorial. But in spite of the fact that many individual neighborhoods, particularly in remote parts of Norway or southern Sweden, might cling to customs a thousand years old, the evolution of the distinctly personal gods continued on its way.

Thor is a particularly prominent personage, not only as the strong and merry god of the myths, but distinctly for his religious character. He is the divinity who protects from evil. In myth, he is the destroyer of monsters; in religion, it is he who is invoked against sickness and hunger; it is he with whose hammer-token men bless themselves from the cradle to the grave, and who defends even the peace of the grave. He also keeps the peace of the popular assembly; when the days of the week came to be named, Thursday (*Thor's day*) was frequently selected as the day for the thing meetings. He has evolved from a thunderer into a god of the weather; and he is called upon for strength, in other words, he has become a war god for the combatant who must depend on his powerful arm. However, he is blithe and jovial in his nature; he is the "friend of man," a strong and helpful big brother of the race.

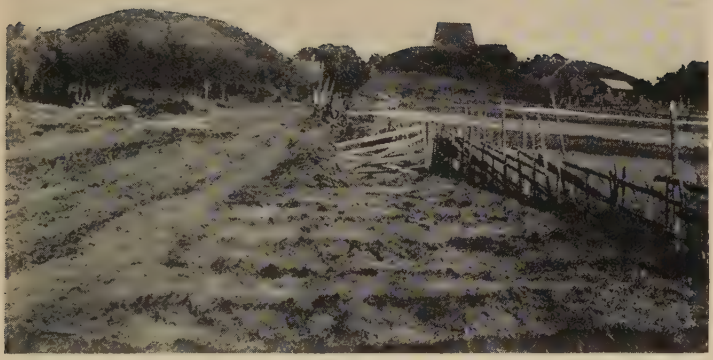
Frey is the god of generation, who supplies cows

and sheep with a generous posterity; he is invoked at weddings and gives peace and plenty. Frey's poetic image has a gentle charm which we look for in vain among other Scandinavian ideals of manhood: "Frey is the best of the bold fighters in Asir's yard; he offends no maid and no man's wife; he looses the bonds of the captive." The stud-horse, the stallion, the bull, and the ram were not infrequently consecrated to Frey, and he is therefore often conceived by the rich peasants as their steadfast friend. He and his father Njörd are particularly often invoked at the Yule feast for "harvest and peace in the time to come," but the Scandinavians appear never to have thought of calling upon this god in the great crises of life, and this sets definite limits to his power.

Odin is the god of battle and cunning. Viewed historically, although he is the king of the gods and the father of the Asir, Odin is the youngest of them all. His worship spread northward in the course of the Iron Age. Even in the Viking Age, his temple-worship had not yet gained a firm hold in western Norway or in the Viking colonies to the West. Since he was soon associated with the nocturnal rout through forest and heath, he developed into a god of death who carried the souls of the deceased away with him. This opened the way to making him the ruler of a celestial Valhalla, as well as the god who disposed the outcome of battle; the next step was then to make him head of the gods. He had already attained this

position among the ancient Teutons in the days of Tacitus, being honored by human sacrifices; his primacy must already have been established among the Scandinavians in the warlike centuries of the Migrations.

Other traits were added to Odin's character. In most of southern Scandinavia, the god who galloped over the fields was considered the one who made the grain grow, and the last sheaf was therefore sacrificed to his horse; but in other places we find Thor encroaching on this domain. Far more important is Odin's function as the god of magic. It was he who sallied forth by night at incredible speed, and it was natural to assume, in an early period, that he was well versed in the arts of magic. From this supposition emerges the figure of a god acquainted with all the secret powers of nature, capable of guiding nature with his word, and communicating his wisdom to his pupils. This is the religious peculiarity of the Odin divinity: it is not impossible to attain familiarity with him. He may be accosted secretly at the crossroads as he dashes along by night and may be compounded with and made to fulfill his promise. "He gives victory to some, money to others, speed and ready wit to many a man." He is said to know the treasures buried in the earth, but, first and foremost, he has all the powers of the mind under his special control. He bestows courage on the warrior and the gift of poetry on the skald; a hero offers



OLD UPPSALA

where the church was built on the site of the heathen temple, in the foreground the grave mounds of ancient kings

ODIN AND HIS RAVENS,

Fragment of a king's helmet unearthed from one of the graves at Vendel, north of Uppsala, dating from the Early Viking Age

thanks to Odin in a lay for having endowed him with the bold spirit that always transformed secret enemies into open opponents. There are indications that this worship of Odin was changed into a special religion within the pagan frame. Men are "dedicated" to Odin and thereby made his servants; childless couples may beget children after invoking Odin, whereupon the children belong to Odin. Odin's songs of sorcery, as intoned in the "Hall of the High," are repeated by men on earth as a profound secret entrusted to them, and it is whispered about that these are the mysterious runic words which everywhere maintain the course of life and bestow power on men; it is said that they were recorded in primeval ages by "the great teacher" and were later repeated by Odin among the Asir, as well as by the earthly "teacher" or singer (Thul) among the race of men. Here we come close to a conception of the Asir Odin as merely a sort of runic ruler. In religious practice, this simply means that faith in the other gods is shrinking; wherefore, for instance, should Njörd be invoked for a calm, when Odin has already taught us the magic words that will quiet the sea? "Better to offer no sacrifice than offer too much; offering smacks always of compensation"—thus reads the admonition of the friends of Odin; they appear rather to have worshiped Odin by their prowess in battle, whereby hundreds of warriors were consigned to Valhalla, as well as by other exhibitions of manly virtue which

might show that they were utilizing Odin's gifts.

The faith in Odin is an individual matter, while the worship of Thor is just as distinctly a social function. We accordingly find utilitarian and expedient rules of conduct proclaimed in Odin's name, in the many proverbs that, fused together in the course of ages with mythical ingredients, are collected in the "Speeches of the High One," the Hávamál, but we find Odin with quite different functions in the heroic myths. Here he punishes the treacherous king who has advanced himself by faithlessness to all his next of kin; he punishes Geirrod, Heidrek, Ivar Vidfadmir. This must not be overlooked, since some students of religion are inclined to deny any moral significance to the gods of paganism. It must be pointed out that, in a certain cycle of sagas, Odin has been made the one who upholds a morality of the gods against impious, selfish men. But it cannot be denied that, according to many versions, he who pursued his own wishes ruthlessly found considerable assistance in sayings attributed to Odin.

Another peculiarity worthy of note is Odin's place as ruler in the realm of the dead. We cannot take this as a point of departure for his relation to men; we may not, as was done in the Middle Ages, understand this condition as equivalent to the immortality of the Christians and assume Valhalla—with the necessary alterations—to be a paradise in which Odin rewarded those whom he loved. Shining Valhalla and gloomy

Hel are not sharply distinguished from each other in genuine pagan sources. No truly pagan warrior delights in death, but the romantic Middle Ages may have a Ragnar Lodbrok say: "Soon I shall drink ale on the high seat with the Asir; the *dísir* invite me to Odin's hall . . . the hour of life has passed; laughing I die." In the ancient poems there is considerable doubt as to whether the deceased have proceeded to Hel or to Valhalla. The truly pagan lay of King Hákon the Good is far less audacious than Ragnar Lodbrok's death song. The king hears the Valkyries riding through the air, condemning him and many other combatants to be slain: "Why dost award the battle so, Skogul? We deserve victory from the gods." The army that was to achieve Valhalla, we learn in the poem, was not a cheerful army. They were much more inclined to offer Odin the souls of their enemies than their own.

The central point of Odin's relation to men was not to be found in the life beyond, but in the aid the god might give in this world, in the compact that might be made with him in the course of this life. The worship of Thor and Odin as special protectors in all the relations of life here appear as the two great expressions of the wish to obtain a personal god to trust in. The fact that both these gods were thus singled out contained elements of conflict in religious practice. A man who has chosen Thor for his *fulltrúi* will deny the power of the word and of cunning;

the worshiper of Odin, on the other hand, will feel himself superior to the naïve faith in the blows of Thor's hammer. This opposition is expressed clearly in the legend concerning the Battle of Fýris Plain (in Uppland, Sweden, about 985 A.D.). Before the battle, King Erik sacrificed to Odin; the opposing king, Styrbjörn, sacrificed to Thor. During the night, a tall man in a blue cloak came to Erik and gave him a long branch which he was to throw over the hostile army with the words: "Odin has you all"; and when Erik did this on the day of battle, Styrbjörn's army was stricken with blindness by a great cloud of sand; thus Odin had given the victory to his friends. A dialogue poem in the Elder Edda, the Lay of Harbard, is built up on a similar opposition; the powerful but impetuous Thor is presented as the target for the mockery of Odin, disguised as an old man. Odin is a god for chieftains, for the mentally sophisticated, but he cannot gain the confidence of the multitude. He owes this to his nocturnal uncanniness, to the cunning duplicity shown in the myths about him, and also to the fact that in battle he fells him he loves. And when Christianity casts its firebrand into men's hearts, Odin's profound weakness becomes apparent: among a people who set fealty so high, Odin cannot be forgiven that he is full of treachery.

But in spite of this dark side, we must not lose sight of the valuable phase of the Odin worship. For the first time we have here the idea of a spiritual force.

To Odin, wisdom is power; the ravens Hugin and Munin (Thought and Memory) fly over all the world as his messengers; magic words execute his will. The Odin cult consolidates the consciousness of the fact that the powers of the soul are the highest powers and that to express them in *action* is most pleasing to the gods. In a religious sense, this cult leads us to grasp divinity in its highest form as intelligence and volition; it recognizes consecration, compact, the obligation of the individual to carry out everywhere in his life the demands of the divinity.

Thus, pagan mythology presents two unlike pinnacles. In the first place, the power of divinity and its good will toward human society; in the second place, a divine intelligence with a discriminating preference for individuals—the most aristocratic individuals. At times it was possible to evade this difficulty by invoking simultaneously the three (or four) greatest Asir, or by addressing prayers to all the powers of divinity and nature at once. But this practice would not satisfy all the conditions of life; for the entire mode of thought required the existence of a personal relation of confidence and responsibility to the divine as well as to individual men.

IV. HEROIC LEGENDS

LEGENDS of heroes are later than myths of the gods. This is true, at any rate, of the heroic legends which we encounter in rich profusion among the Scandinavians and other Germanic tribes. They are not childishly fantastic fairy tales of heroes who ride to the ends of the earth, past sun and moon, who cleave rocks with their swords and gallop on through the cleft into the depths of the mountain. On the contrary, they are circumscribed by the limits of reality; they reflect the life of historical chieftains and warriors. Among certain of the Germanic peoples we find a few indications of how these legends appeared before the Migration of Nations; they dealt with brave warriors whose deeds were sung by later generations when faced with their new enemies. But then the period of Migration swept down upon them like a great ice age; tribes rolled over more ancient domiciles, crushed out all traces of earlier life, and imparted new forms to whole regions. Gigantic fig-

ures flash forth, founding realms of unprecedented extent, only to disappear like shooting stars, their rule now only a memory. Ermanrik and his East Gothic kingdom, Attila's dominion of the Huns, and Theodoric's Italian kingdom, dominated the imagination of the poets in their age, just as the great Napoleon cast his spell over the poets of his day and after.

It was the same in Scandinavia. So far as we are able to tell, there was but a short span of years between the brilliant period of Hróar at Leire in Zealand and his son Hrörik's bloody collision with his kinsman Hrólf; nor is the interval long between the latter event and the fall of Harald Wartooth on Bravalla Heath in Sweden. Helgi Hundingsbani and certain famous Jutish and Swedish royal names may be assigned with some probability to the same period, which would then correspond pretty closely with the first important establishment of a state in Denmark as well as with the period when Theodoric and other kings of the Migration period ruled in southern lands. There is, however, a difference. In the Northern countries the thread of reminiscences connecting the present with the earlier centuries was not so rudely broken as among the southern Germanic peoples, and a few of our legendary heroes appear to go back into the centuries immediately preceding the Migration. There can hardly be any doubt that the King Sigar who had Hagbard hanged and was

himself defeated by Hagbard's avengers must be sought among the Danes before the period of the great events that cluster around Hrólf Kraki, and that the Offa or Uffi who became famous through his border conflicts lived among the Angles for a considerable period before their migration to England. But on the whole, the progress of events seems to have been about the same everywhere; the formation of states, the rise of the royal power, and the heroic lay go hand in hand.

In spite of the fact that the heroic lay had its origin in contemporary deeds, it does not degenerate into a mere rhymed chronicle. In the first place, the picture is transformed by the minstrel, who concentrates the material, emphasizes its contrasts, and casts strong light or deep shadow over the characters, until the original legend has undergone great changes. But of far greater significance is the fact that this poetry was not animated by group interests in any form so much as by an immediate and keen sympathy with the individual characters.

The theme sung by the skald in the hall, when the fire cast its ruddy glow over the long rows of warriors, while the mead horn passed from hand to hand, was not the joy of life but its sorrow. The skald sang of Svanhild trampled under the horses' hoofs because her husband believed her faithless; of her brothers who sought to avenge her, but fell fighting against superior strength. He sang of the daughter

of the Danish king who was given as wife to the ancestral enemy, the king of Hadbard's line, but while the wedding feast was being celebrated an old warrior egged on his countrymen, and the ancient bloody fighting was resumed in the very hall of the king. One subject that recurs frequently is the Hildebrand motive. An aged warrior meets on the field of battle his own son who was born after the father went into exile, and before they become known to each other the father inflicts a mortal wound on the son. Sometimes additional tragic features are injected: he who is about to be killed believes that the other's desire to spare him is mere trickery; or he well knows of the relationship, but would rather fall by the hand of a kinsman than withdraw from the combat he has accepted. Death scenes are very numerous in Northern literature. There is Bjarki voicing defiance against the god that rules destiny, and there is Hjalmar, who lies on a distant shore wounded to death, and pictures to himself the joys of the life he is now leaving. A grave, quiet lament over the hard judgments of the Norns, over the grief of life, its insecurity and pain, finds expression in these lays. But when the poet has ended his song, the hearts of the warriors are again made bold, after the hour in which they have sat as if listening to a spectral voice telling them of distress and adverse fates. Joy rises once more among the drinking men, and in loud voices they praise the fleeting pleasures that are all

the sweeter because reality with its coldness and sorrow awaits them outside.

The heroes of this poetry are of the warrior caste. In fact they are almost always of chieftain rank, elevated by birth and condition above the ordinary limits of everyday humanity. Both men and women are characterized by certain fundamental traits of character. They are creatures whose will is of tremendous strength. Their ego is like a block of granite, which can be cleft or crushed, but not moved. The content of the tale is the clashing of these stern wills, the striking of sparks in their collision, and the crushing of one by the other's mass. They are people who regard it as of no importance to save their lives, but who have set themselves certain goals and will stake all on following to the end the course they have marked out for themselves. Therefore there is no possibility of avoiding clashes where these life-lines intersect. Each individual is inexorable in his determination to put through his own will; it is impossible for him to abandon the field or even to compromise. The collision becomes inevitable, and the injury inflicted on individual pride is irreparable. Satisfaction may only be had in forcing one's adversary into the same plight, crushing him in the same way. The power of vengeance is one of the leading themes in the heroic legends.

It is characteristic of these people that they feel the bonds uniting them with certain others so keenly

and profoundly that no lesser ties have any meaning for them, if such ties conflict with their intense devotion to the chosen ones. Thus, among the Germans, Kriemhild is entirely dominated by her desire to avenge her husband, and this passion drives her even to fratricide. Among the Scandinavians, Bjarki is in revolt against the gods because of his loyalty to his dead lord. There is a lofty idealism in the admiration of the poets for these mighty characters, these men and women who, though their actions are contrary to all common everyday standards, never for a moment are in doubt as to their rights and duties.

These are the fundamental traits both in the cycle of legends native to the North and in the other great group which came to the North from Germany. The historical subjects of the latter are usually taken from the Gothic states that developed during the Migration of Nations; the songs received their first form among the southern Germanic tribes, and came to the North before or during the Viking Age. Though their emotional content is the same as those of the North, they are somewhat different in artistic form and in background. The heroes of the southern Germanic tribes are less closely associated with their past, their race, and their kindred, but are found gathered in the great legendary royal castles, first at the court of Ermanrik, then with Attila, or Theodoric, who was called Didrik of Bern (Theodoric of Verona). The motley confusion of nations in the migratory

period is here reflected, producing a crystallization of legends around the famous legendary centers. Equally important among the Scandinavians is the insistence on the continuity of the race. While once it was an accidental historical reminiscence, it is gradually developed into a rule of art of the first order. The same characteristics and the same motives of action develop with increasing emphasis from generation to generation, until they attain their highest pinnacle, and on this eminence their glory is extinguished. Thus, the race of the Skjöldungs ends with the fall of Hrólf; the line of Sigar ends with Signe's burning down her virgin bower; the long line of the Volsungs ends with the murder of Sigurd, and that of the Gjúkungs with the death of Gunnar in the snake-pit. This family poetry is expressive of a brooding on the thread of life, on the dependence of posterity on its antecedents, and on guilt—which bears its fruit in misfortune.

Probably the oldest of these legends as to its material is that of the love of Hagbard and Signe. Furthermore, it is the first legend to become generally celebrated all over Scandinavia. The tale of love here unfolded does not tell of soft caresses, but of the capacity of love to steel the will until it soars, yet more indomitable, to heights above the limitations of human life. Hagbard may not win Signe; there is blood between their lines; he has slain her brothers in a viking raid. Disguised as a shield-

maiden, he enters her bower, but is discovered by an evil tale-bearer and, on King Sigar's orders, must be hanged. In a conversation during their bridal night, Hagbard asks Signe what degree of fidelity he may expect of her if he should be caught and killed by Sigar. She replies that, once she has let him have his will, no death that could befall him would be so bitter that she would not gladly share it with him. On the gallows hill, Hagbard causes his cloak to be hoisted first on the gallows, and a moment later he sees the flames rise from Signe's bower. He then utters a jubilant cry praising the power of love that cannot be overcome even by death, for now his bride has gone forth before him and opened the gates of Hel to him. But Hagbard on the gallows hill is a victor not only in love. When he is led up to be hanged, the queen steps forth; she wishes to taste the sweetness of visiting vengeance upon the slayer of her sons, and herself hands him a drinking horn with the mocking invitation to drink his leave from life. "I take thy drink," he answers, "with this same hand wherewith I slew thy sons; unavenged I go not hence; but thou, sonless mother, shalt never find a time when thou canst redeem the pledges thou hast given Hel!" In the face of death, as helpless as man may be, Hagbard is yet depicted as an indomitable hero who cannot be bent by any power in the world. And the legend adorns his death with the splendid episode of the arrival of his brother Haki with his

viking host, who cuts down King Sigar and all his men and destroys the ancient royal splendor of Sigarstead in one mighty pyre.

Many centuries of evolution are necessary before such iron figures can be molded into the beauty of the more erotic legends. The later epoch of Northern antiquity envelops the legend in family tales built up of love motives, into the tales of Sigrid's shy pride and Alfhild's shield-maiden defiance. Then comes the medieval ballad of Havbor and the virgin Signild, in which the mighty flames of love burst forth unrestrained, and the ballad of Benedict, where compassion for the death of the lover is the main theme; also, there is the chivalric medieval Havbor ballad which has a playfully idyllic and tender treatment of the scene where the lover comes disguised as a maiden; and, finally, there are the numerous folk tales connected with a definite locality—more numerous than those of any other legend in Scandinavia—all retaining the fundamental love theme of the heroic legend: the connection between the gallows and the burning virgin bower.

The Hagbard legend draws its magic circle through the world of legendary tales; within this circle, all things must be colored by the Hagbard tale. The same is true of the other great love legend, that of Helgi Hundingsbani and Sigrun. Originally Helgi is a warrior hero, "the bane of Hunding and Hodbrodd," but his tale develops more and more

into one of family tragedy and love destiny; its main content becomes Sigrun's union with him in spite of the objections of her kinsmen. One of the scenes is this: Helgi is dead, treacherously murdered by her brother Dag; but Sigrun's longing recalls the dead; she goes out in the evening to meet her lover at his funeral mound and lies down full of devotion in the dead man's cold arms. "Now nothing is impossible," he cries jubilantly, "when you, fair daughter of Hogni, can sleep in the arms of the dead!" The power of love surmounts even the horrors of death.

But the greatest legend of the North was after all that of the Skjöldungs, the kings at Leire in Denmark. The most powerful lay of a court minstrel and the most delicate art of the saga teller combined to give it a richness attained by no other. The historical background of the Skjöldung legends belongs to the most warlike period of the Danes during the Migration of Nations; the fall of the great king is the central point around which the work crystallizes. But in the form in which we now have it, it is a genealogical legend of the richest stamp. As a sort of prologue, Skjöld, the father of the race, is depicted in his marvelous strength as a young hero who captures bears even while yet a boy, or who as a tender babe is sent into the country by unknown powers. And then, as a sort of second prologue or prophecy, we have Frid-Frodi with his Golden Age and his gold-grinding mill. But Frodi is filled with

boundless greed; he obliges the giant maidens to turn the mill day and night, and in their desire for vengeance they arise and grind for him hostile armies and discord among his next of kin. Thus the story of this family begins with fratricide and the exile and vengeance of the two young princes Hróar and Helgi; continues as the tale of the enmity between the restless and the peaceful brother, and creates the tragic motive of Helgi's shameless lust leading him to acts of incest. For this reason his son Hrólf is not only the noblest scion of the Skjöldung line, but is also doomed to destruction and childlessness. His fate overtakes him in a treacherous onslaught by his sister Skuld and his brother-in-law Hjarvard, at Leire castle. There fall Hrólf and all his men; one young warrior alone, Viggi, remains to avenge his death on his treacherous murderers. So ends the entire race of the Skjöldungs.

To a later age Hrólf appeared as "the most lordly ancient king of the North," whom even Christian kings would most of all like to resemble. Yet he owes this reputation not to any deed performed during his life, but rather to the fidelity of his warriors after his death; it is this which imparts brightness to their chief. A skald of his court has seized the thoughts which animated Hrólf and his comrades and has given them life in a poem about the last bloody conflict at Leire. In his Bjarkamál this poet has created the figure of the young Hjalti, who with his songs

eggs on his comrades to the desperate struggle against superior forces, and who declaims a memorial poem on his fallen lord to the few that remain to avenge him. The poet strikes still deeper notes when he conjures up Bjarki's figure before his listeners. Bjarki has a brow that is firm under blows, an arm that can cleave all things, a burning devotion to the master to whom his life belongs. We see him in his hour of death, indifferent to the affection of his faithful wife and full of defiant hatred against Odin, who has willed his lord's fall, whereupon he lays himself down by the head of the fallen chief, and bids Hjalti take his place at Hrólf's feet, so that men who live after them may know that they kept the oath they had sworn. The thought that inspired hundreds of warrior retainers here found its poetic expression; in the figure of Bjarki, the poet succeeded in uniting the two favorite types of his age: the obstinate savage warrior, and the hero with a lofty ideal.

As a companion piece to the ancient Skjöldung cycle, another later Skjöldung cycle arose later in the Viking Age, a cycle in which Starkad was represented as the bravest warrior and in which the times are traced from the remote forefathers Dan and Frid-Frodi down to the awakening energy of Ingjald. But there are obviously such personal and historical elements in this work that we must consider it in its relation to the life of the vikings.

Of more ancient origin, on the other hand, are the legends of kings which are closely associated with Jutland. They are remarkable for the fact that their hero borrows his external traits from the simple ash-blower Esben of the fairy tale, yet he is also characterized by the firm will of the ideal hero. Here we have Amled (Hamlet) who under the mask of insanity utters profound truths and ultimately prepares the way for his execution of vengeance for his father, as planned by him years before. Here also is Uffi. As an historical figure, Uffi belongs to the ancient Angles; but Danish poetry made an entirely new man of this old border fighter, a manly figure, concealing under his awkward exterior the strength of the hero as well as the hero's grasp of his great task; a scion of kings who at the decisive moment rescues the life of his nation and realm; a Dane who incurs a double risk because he is fighting not only for the existence, but also for the honor of his people.

To no small degree it was Denmark that supplied the other Scandinavian countries with their heroic legends. Swedish vikings, and, even more, Norwegian poets and saga tellers, continued to develop the Skjöldung cycle; they invented, for instance, an earlier phase in the life of the heroes, making Norwegians of them. The domestic Norwegian petty kings could not be made interesting to a wider circle; at best they could be sung in a form of poetry that was an echo of the Skjöldung cycle. It is more

remarkable that Sweden did not produce any cycle of legends that attained importance throughout the North. The legends concerning the kings of the Yngling race remain of chiefly local interest, in spite of the prestige of Uppsala. In the chronicle-like traditions, we can, however, distinguish an older group in which the destinies of a family—the murder of kin—is the whole content, and a later group, dating from the Migrations, in which reminiscences of campaigns against the Jutes or Esths are included. An originally Swedish legend that became fairly important for all of Scandinavia was the battle for the Uppsala princess between Hjalmar and the savage Småland berserks. This is a sad love story which became the point of departure for a cycle of legends connected with the curse on the sword Tyrfing, in which there are also south European traditions of the great battle against the Huns.

Though neither Sweden nor Norway had a rich heroic poetry of native origin, they created a substitute by borrowing legendary lore, partly from the Danes and still more from the related Teutons farther to the south.

Among the legendary materials which Scandinavians have in common with other Germanic races and which came to Scandinavia from the south, that of the smith Völund and his revenge is the foremost. The main content of the tale, which remains throughout the ages, is that of the king's capture and laming

of Völund, whereupon Völund is made to perform work as a bondman for the king. But though he has become a thrall, Völund still has strength and ingenuity enough to avenge himself; he cuts off the heads of the king's young sons, hides their bodies under the floor of his smithy, violates the king's daughter, and escapes through the air on wings which he has fashioned with the aid of his art, thus freeing himself from the rule of the wicked Nidud. A later age, perhaps only after the legend reached the North, added gentler and more imaginative details, in the ancient legendary theme of the girls who fly over the dark forest from the south in the guise of swans, and who alight by the shore of the lake to discard their swan garments; whereupon the young men steal their disguises and thus oblige them to remain as their wives. But as the years go by, the swan women tire of domestic life, "long for the dark forest," and one day all three desert their husbands. "Völund sat alone then in Wolf Dales and encircled the sparkling stone in red gold; thus he waited for his shining wife, whether she would come to him again." But as he sits fashioning rings of gold, King Nidud hears of his treasure; the king and his men come by night, "in the light of the waning moon," and overpower the lone warrior in his sleep. In the ancient poem, the love of the swan-maiden is not—as in Oehlenschläger and Drachmann—the principal content of Völund's life; it is only the brighter intro-

duction to the heavier and gloomy scenes, and the whole object of the poem was not his reunion with the sweetheart of his youth but his successful vengeance: "Laughing, Völund soared into the air; weeping went Bodvild from the isle." But the juxtaposition of stern and gentle traits in our lay of Völund gives evidence of the poetic power possessed by our poets. It may often be compared with the varied colors of the painter, still more often with the firmer plastic art of the wood-carver.

The great group of legends concerning the Volsungs contain a succession of incidents. First there is the episode of Sigmund and Sinfjötli; then Sigurd's youth and the slaying of Fáfnir, then Sigurd and Brynhild; then Atli's faithlessness to the sons of Gjúki, and last, the final addition to the legend, Svanhild's death by being trodden under horses' hoofs, and the attempt of her brothers, Hamdi and Sorli, to avenge her.

The tale of Sigmund and Sinfjötli is stamped with a peculiar grandeur and savagery. Odin appears as the secret helper of the young hero; the god enters King Volsung's hall at the marriage feast of Volsung's daughter Signe, thrusts a sword into the trunk of the tree around which the house is built, whereupon he disappears; Volsung's young son Sigmund turns out to be the man who will extricate the sword. But Signe's husband dislikes his kinsmen by marriage; he invites them to a feast and has them ex-

posed, in fetters, to the beasts of the forest. Sigmund escapes with his life, and lives as a robber in the forest. Signe goes out to join him, gains his love, and then bears her son Sinfjötli, who is a Volsung both by his father and his mother, and is therefore hardy enough to wreak vengeance. She puts his prowess to the test, sending him out to the forest to join Sigmund. They live together there—dressed in wolf-skins, according to the legend—and when the boy has become a man, they go to Siggeir's hall. Though captured by Siggeir, they succeed in drawing forth the sword again and burn down the king's hall over his head. Signe, herself an accessory to her husband's destruction, nevertheless chooses to die with him, and voluntarily enters the flames. Sinfjötli later meets death, also in internecine conflict. His stepmother gives him poison which he drinks in order not to incur her scoffing. Sigmund carries away his dead son with him, until an old boatman receives the body and promises to row it across the fjord, but no sooner is the body on the boat, than the old man disappears, vessel and all; Odin has called for his young warrior. Finally, Sigmund meets death in battle at the hands of Odin himself, when the sword Gram is shattered against the god's spear.

The Sinfjötli tale is in one respect the pinnacle of Scandinavian heroic legend: savage and fantastic, with intervening gods, with men assuming the forms of beasts, with its sharp contrast between the hero's

CARVED DOOR POSTS

from Hyllested Church, in Norway, illustrating the story of Sigurd slaying the Dragon Fáfnir

enemies, who are sheer wickedness, and the heroic figures, whose delicate sense of honor impels them almost to throw away their lives lest they appear to have shirked a duty. A worthy introduction to the Volsung race and yet in all its details a legend that may be considered an independent entity, Sinfjötli's death—as well as Hrólf Kraki's—seems to have been planned originally as the destructive culmination of his line; but the strong desire to construct genealogical sagas later makes the whole story a mere prelude to Sigurd, slayer of Fáfnir.

Sigurd's battle with the dragon guarding the treasure on the heath is again introduced with a long preliminary tale of the changing owners of the gold, as well as the curse which lies upon it, and, owing to Regin's intrigues, this prefatory story continues to twine about Sigurd's latest career. But Sigurd's deed itself is, of course, the central episode. The hero's combat with the monstrous serpent is a very primitive theme of imaginative heroic legends; but it was hardy enough to maintain itself in spite of the later shift in the heroic poetry to a more historical narrative. This deed—though it does not stand alone, being merely the favorite episode in Sigurd's greatness—makes Sigurd the most admired figure of primitive times. Numerous pictures on Swedish rune stones and on crosses in the Viking colonies, as well as in Norwegian wooden churches, depict the moment when

Sigurd plunges the sword into the serpent's heart.[1] In the poetry of his epoch, Sigurd is the youthful hero in his most impressive form, as he stands before the dying monster. He has enterprise and self-confidence: "My bold spirit egged me on, and my strong hand saw to the doing of the deed." The object of this adventure is to test his prowess and obtain the gold; for this "red gleaming metal" entices him with its brightness and with the power and glory which it bestows, nay, even by the danger it brings to its owner. He is a true viking character.

The conclusion of this entire first section of the Volsung legend is the tale of Sigurd's ride up the mountain and his awakening of the sleepbound maiden Sigrdrifa, a love-motive which appears never to be fully developed, being superseded by another sterner and more bitter version of the same story.

And then there is the other phase of Sigurd's life,

[1] The accompanying picture (facing page 77) presents the entire series of scenes in this legend (the series begins at the bottom on the right): (1) Regin forges a sword for Sigurd; (2) Sigurd proves the sword by cleaving the anvil (Sigurd then obtains the fragments of the sword Gram, which Regin fashions into a new sword); (3) Sigurd, sitting in a pit, plunges the sword into Fáfnir's breast; (4) (Below, on the pillar to the left) Sigurd proceeds to broil Fáfnir's heart for Regin; he moistens his finger in Fáfnir's blood, then puts his finger to his lips, whereupon he is enabled to understand the voices of the birds, who warn him that Regin plans his death; (5) Sigurd slays Regin; below we see the horse Grani, laden with Fáfnir's gold; (6) Gunnar, in the snake-pit, plays the harp with his toes, his hands being bound.

lacking in youthful audacity, but of a tragic seriousness, less fantastic, but considerably more real in its trappings, and—as we shall see—capable of assimilating important historical legendary material. This is Sigurd's encounter with Brynhild.

For a proper understanding of the clash between Sigurd and Brynhild, we must bear in mind the entire conception of the relation between man and woman in the heroic lays. The unconscious power of love, its attraction and seeking, its sensuous bond, is not present in the ancient legend from the outset, as it is in all our modern literature. Men and women are individuals, all having their wills and aspirations. Their action and their revenge are not determined by erotic motives, but are the outcome of the ethical system peculiar to the heroic life, a circumstance that will repeatedly give us pause.

Essentially of this nature are the dual but united fortunes of Sigurd and Brynhild as they still appear in the oldest of the lays that are preserved. The maiden Brynhild sits in defiant pride in her lonely virgin bower, entirely surrounded by the flickering flames; she will marry only the hero who can burst through her hedge of fire. King Gunnar, Gjúki's son, would win her, but cannot pierce the flames. He obtains the aid of his brother-in-law, Sigurd, the dragon's slayer, who pretends to be Gunnar, or even assumes Gunnar's form, and in this guise rides through the fire and seizes the maiden as a bride. She

proceeds to the home of Gjúki's sons as Gunnar's wife. All is well until women's bickerings awaken smoldering disaster. Gudrun and Brynhild go down to the river to bathe; Brynhild wades out farther than Gudrun, and on Gudrun's asking the reason for this, Brynhild answers that she would not stand with her, for she owns the lordlier husband, who was able to pierce the wall of flames. Gudrun then shows Brynhild that she, Gudrun, wears Brynhild's betrothal ring; it was Sigurd that rode through the fire and won her as a bride. Brynhild grows pale and recoils; she is betrayed in that which she considered highest in life, and feels only hatred for those who brought this thing upon her, mostly for Sigurd, but also for Gunnar. She eggs on her husband Gunnar to slay Sigurd, by saying that Sigurd had abused his disguise as Gunnar during the night that he was with her as her wooer. Gunnar takes counsel with his brothers, who participate in the murder unwillingly. We behold them on their way back to the royal seat. Gudrun waits in vain to welcome her lord; Hogni informs her mockingly that the gray horse stands outside the gate, its head lowered over Sigurd's mutilated corpse. Brynhild's laughter makes all the walls resound as she offers welcome to them as victors. Subsequently she tells Gunnar that it was not Sigurd who broke faith with him, but he who broke faith with Sigurd, and that vengeance would be wreaked upon him.

This, the oldest Scandinavian form of the legend, resembles very closely the German poem, and therefore approaches the basic form of the tale. But during the era of Eddic poetry, it suffered a transformation both in the action and in the characters. Principally, the Scandinavians were impressed with the figure of Brynhild. They delighted in her fierce love of vengeance. They were drawn to this strange creature who in the eyes of all onlookers seemed a monster born among men for the undoing of men ("she came from her mother's womb a monstrous birth. . . . Let her go thither whence she may never be born again!"), and who was at the same time the incarnation of all the qualities most highly praised in the heroic lay.

The thought must have arisen that, as a maiden in her citadel of flames, she had a right to the love of the most glorious of heroes, namely Sigurd, because he alone fulfilled the conditions she had set. Even in the oldest of the lays this thought is expressed. It is the night after the murder. Gunnar has tossed about restlessly, unable to sleep; the warning shrieks of the birds of prey attracted by the slaying are still in his ears. Toward day, Brynhild awakes: "Ye may beseech me or forbid me, now that the harm is wrought, to say my sorrow or keep it silent." All were silent at her words; none could grasp her female fickleness in now upbraiding them for that to which she had egged them on. "I shudder in my

dreams; it was cool here in the hall; my bed was cold; but thou, my prince, rodest joyless, chainbound into the host of enemies. Thy entire Niblung race has lost its strength, perjurers that ye are; dost not remember well, Gunnar, when ye mingled your blood in your footprints;[1] now thou hast ill rewarded him who placed thee highest. When he rode in boldly to win me, he proved how a prince of battle should keep faith with his own king; his blade, inlaid with gold, did the courageous king lay between us twain; the edge shone like fire, but drops of venom were hidden within."

With the intuitive ability to delve in the depths of the soul-life, which appears surprisingly strong in the Viking Age, an attempt is made to understand Brynhild's mind. The explanation given is that she loves Sigurd even before she is aware of it herself, and is impelled by the desperate desire to possess his love. A later lay paints this with even more vigorous colors. It is evening. Brynhild sits outside her door alone, talking to herself: "I will hold Sigurd, the young hero, in my arms, or else die. Then spake I words that I now rue. Gudrun is his wife and I am Gunnar's. Grim Norns forged baleful longing for me." And thus she goes on, wandering about alone in the night, over ice and glaciers, full of ill-will against Gudrun, and egged on by an insane desire, until her

[1] A part of the ceremony of swearing blood brotherhood, the oath which Gunnar and Sigurd had taken.

plan is matured, and she incites Gunnar to the murder.

In the legendary material this feature is developed into a beginning, as well as a conclusion of the entire situation. The beginning is a betrothal between the two, intended to assign to Brynhild a right to Sigurd prior to his marriage to Gudrun. The betrothal is accomplished by making her the maiden on the hill whom he awakens, or—and this is the more common version—by having him pay a visit to Brynhild in his youth, when she is still living with her foster father Heimir at Hlymdalir. This betrothal—this former right—to Sigurd as a husband, may be somewhat Philistine; but even heroic legends pass through an epoch in which it is well to have one's papers in order, so that there may be no doubt as to what are the moral rights of a situation. This second preliminary requires the invention of a new episode to explain Sigurd's breaking the betrothal: Gudrun's mother, Grimhild, hands him a drink of forgetfulness. Then a conclusion of more purely poetic power is fashioned: when Sigurd has been killed, Brynhild reveals her entire previous story, whereupon she plunges the sword into her own breast; dying, she asks that she be placed on the pyre by the side of Sigurd.

In addition to this large, simple outline of the tale, we have also the contributions of the individual poet, who may expand the thought and impart moral pro-

fundity to it. Not only does Brynhild love Sigurd, but he in return has in his heart loved her from the moment he rode through the fire to find her and dwell in her bower with the drawn sword between them; but, bound by oath to Gudrun, he has conquered his love. Then comes the great reckoning between them, when he seeks to calm her grief, whereupon she becomes aware of his love for her. Brynhild then sees no other escape but his death and hers; to kill Gunnar would be of no avail; she will not have two husbands in one hall, as she puts it. Bowed by sorrow, his heart swelling so that it bursts his byrnie, Sigurd departs from their last meeting, ready for the misfortune that is now to descend upon him and all.

There are also later poems among our Eddic lays which do not concern themselves with a presentation of the story, but rather with an evaluation of the characters and lives involved.

Brynhild is on her way to the realm of the dead; she is traveling the road to Hel when a Giant woman living in the mountain attempts to stop her progress, and reproaches her with her baleful mode of life; but Brynhild recounts her career to the woman, showing how she has kept herself free from perjury, while others have deceived her: "Sink into the earth, Giantess! I shall pass my life with Sigurd!"

Another poet has set himself the same task with regard to Sigurd. The young hero visits his uncle Gripir, and asks questions concerning his own fu-

ture. He is informed of his impending deeds of prowess, and yet he asks impatiently for more, becoming excited when he learns the tragic outcome of his own life, namely to plight his troth to one and yet marry another. "Is there a curse upon my life? Is there lack of will in my mind?" This he demands to know. Under this constraint, the old man reluctantly looks into the future, and finds that it is Grimhild's treachery that crosses his path, finally consoling him with the information that his career has realized its great goal: "No more lordly man shall come upon the earth than thou, Sigurd."

One passage of Sigurd's life recurs again and again in the legend as that which holds the key to his entire career, namely, his dash through the flames, disguised as Gunnar, to reach Brynhild, and his lying by her side, but with the sword between them, to witness that he keeps faith with King Gunnar. This sharp sword lying between them is all the ethics of the heroic lay in concentrated form: the victory of a preconceived purpose over the alluring power of the moment; fidelity to a plighted word is the highest fidelity toward oneself. A modern Danish poet—Carl Gjellerup in his *Brynhild*—has depicted the power of temptation in gripping words. The ancient period had no words to express what it vaguely adumbrated; it could only crystallize the entire significance of the moment in the sword's blade that lay between the two, preciously inlaid with gold, but

sharp as the fire and the venom that burned in its edge.

The ancient Scandinavians stressed two episodes in which they fully express all their being. One is Sigurd's victory over Fáfnir, the moment in which he plunges his sword into the dragon's heart. It is the opening, as it were, of the hero's career. Here we see courage to oppose the external enemy; the outcome is prowess and audacity. The other is the sword lying between the hero and his beloved, the victory over himself; the highest achievement of human life is not the external richness of life but the soul's attainment of spiritual elevation. The poet does not hesitate to use asceticism as a motive in the heroic career, when pointing out the hero's strength of spirit.

The latest group of the legends of the Volsung cycle presents the peculiar fundamental type of the heroic legend with minor deviations. Gunnar is rendered more noble; his playing of the harp in Atli's snake-pit causes the serpents to refrain from stinging. His brother Hogni is rendered more savage, for he laughs defiantly as his own heart is being cut out. Their sister Gudrun is also fiercer, for she gives to Atli, in order to secure revenge, the flesh of their own sons to eat, whereupon she slays her husband: "She allowed their couch to drink the blood; with murderous hand she then loosed the dogs, and cast the flaming brand in through the door of the hall; and waked the housecarls; this was her blood-money

for her brothers. To the fire she consigned all that were within, those that returned from Gunnar's murder in the dark forest; the ancient girders crashed, the corpses smoked, the homestead of the Budlungs burned, the shield-maids sank lifeless in blazing embers."

Side by side with this mighty Gudrun, there arose also another picture: Gudrun in her youth, the daughter of Gjúki, given Sigurd to wife, loving him dearly. Gudrun sits by Sigurd's corpse without lamentations; she does not beat her hands or shriek as other women are wont, but grief brings her close to death. Wise chieftains go to her to soothe her sorrow; chieftains' wives with gorgeous golden jewels sit by her side, and each of them rehearses her own greatest grief: the loss of children and brothers and husbands, or want and misfortune. But Gudrun cannot weep, so, dumbfounded with grief, she sits by her husband's corpse. Then her sister Gullrönd steps forth and takes the shroud from Sigurd's body: "Look upon thy lover, place thy mouth on his, as thou heldest the living king in thine arms." Gudrun looks up for the first time, and sees the king's bloody hair, his flashing eyes extinguished, his princely citadel of thought cloven by the sword. Gudrun sinks down upon the couch, her hair disheveled, her cheeks reddened, and the torrents of her eyes run down into her lap; she weeps so that the tears flow through the pillow and make the geese scream in

the yard. And she bursts forth in the eulogy of the hero who shone among men as the spear-leek shines among herbs, as diamonds shine among the pearls of a necklace; she deemed herself higher than the maids of Odin for owning him, yet now she is as frail as a blown leaf. "Upon my seat, upon my couch, I lack my companion; Gjúki's sons wrought this; Gjúki's sons have the guilt for my grief; they brought sore tears to their own sister!"

The Svanhild section comes finally as the epilogue to the entire Volsung literature. The faithless counselor Bikki has undertaken to destroy all the race of Jörmunrek. On his false accusation, Jörmunrek's young queen, the bright fair daughter of Gudrun and Sigurd, is trampled to death by the hoofs of horses after her eyes have been covered so that her firm glance can no longer keep the horses at bay. Her brothers set forth on their mortal journey of vengeance; they wish to kill King Jörmunrek in the very midst of his strength, but, their work half accomplished, they succumb, defiantly fighting, to immensely superior numbers. The foundation for this story is the downfall of the East Gothic King Ermanrik, just as the fall of the Gjúkungs is a reflection of the annihilation of the royal race of the Burgundians at the hands of the Huns. As a subject of poetic treatment, it is a resumption of the same death-defying heroic type: "Well have we fought; we stand on a bulwark of Gothic corpses,

on a mound of sword-food, like eagles on the branches. Good fame have we won, whether we die now or to-morrow; none can live one night more than the Norns have granted." And then the final picture of destruction: there is crash after crash as the royal halls go down in one huge Ragnarök, until all has been destroyed. Greatness and destruction are indissolubly associated; "all warriors die defeated." Such is life; such is the origin of heroic lays.

But the heroic lay reflects the entire development of the people's spiritual life better than anything else could. Making use of the figures that originated in the time of the Migrations, the lay expands to embrace more and more elements, building more definite ideals, acquiring variety in the delineation of character. The might of the feelings is beginning to break through the old reserve, violently as in Gudrun's grief over the slain Sigurd—and yet the feeling is associated with that phase of human life which is expressed in action and volition: Gudrun's grief terminates in a curse upon her perjured brothers and a prophecy of their destruction.

v. THE VIKING AGE

THE Viking Age is as distinctive and significant an epoch as any in the history of the North; in fact, it embraces a series of more far-reaching experiences than any later period, but its chief external feature is of earlier origin. Even the word "viking" was common to all Germanic tribes; roaming bands of warriors by land or sea were known from very primitive times. In the great migratory period, flocks of plundering sea-rovers assumed almost the proportions of a national movement: the Heruli on the Black Sea; Heruli, Saxons, Angles, and later Danes, on the coasts of Britain and France. In time the force of the movement was spent; Angles and Saxons built permanent homes in England; the coast of Gaul was defended by the Franks who had settled there. Ultimately the great ferment which brought about the movement ceased to act.

The Viking expeditions continued in certain regions of the North. The campaigns of the Swedes

to the coasts of the Baltic Sea went on throughout the legendary age. From the western valleys of Norway, from Hordaland and Rogaland, bold mariners ventured forth over the sea to the numerous islands in the West. On the Orkney and Shetland Islands, the Pict fishermen could not offer any effective resistance to their campaigns or settlements. They then proceeded farther to the south, encountering another tribe of the Pictish race, the Irish, or Gaels—as they called themselves—where the civilization produced by the Celts had developed in rich and characteristic forms. In the year 617 occurred the first harrying of the Irish coast by a pagan viking fleet, probably Scandinavian. Then came a short respite, during which the Scottish islands were permanently settled by Northmen. When the Viking Age proper began, the energies of the raiders were directed chiefly against the land of the Irish. Such was the state of affairs, when a great restlessness began all along the line, about the year 800. We cannot trace all the conditions that produced the Viking movement. In the case of Denmark, there is the collision with the empire of Charlemagne, which was encroaching on Scandinavian boundaries. Presumably the establishment of a permanent state had some effect also; chieftains of royal race sought a field for their ambitions, greater than that they had at home. Perhaps also an increasing population—as had often been the case in the history of the Germanic peoples—may

LOS ANGELES MUSEUM
EXPOSITION PARK

have provided a motive for great warlike emigrations.

Suddenly the sea was filled with swarms of viking ships; in 793, a band of Northmen fell upon the island of Lindisfarne off the coast of Northumberland, burned down the monastery, and killed the monks. Each subsequent year marked the destruction of some monastic sanctuary or the harrying of some coast. The expeditions subsequently penetrated farther inland, reaching large cities and regions hitherto spared. About a generation later, the vikings had reached the point where they spent their winters on foreign soil, often in fortified camps at the mouths of rivers, where the path lay open to the heart of the country. Another generation passed, and the period of permanent settlement began; in 876, the Danish army divided the land in Northumberland and plowed it and sowed it. At the same time, Iceland obtained its first settlers, and now there ensued all over northern Europe the great period of land-taking, at the end of the ninth and the beginning of the tenth century.

Any one who had witnessed the first outbreak of the Viking Age would have thought that he was listening to a fairy tale if he could have been told what would transpire within the ensuing century, let us say before the year 900. The great English realm was forced to its knees, after having fought for its very existence against the united viking armies, and even that great ruler and genius Alfred the Great could do no more than hold them off from

southern England; the northern half of the country was indisputably theirs. In Ireland, a Scandinavian petty king occupied every coast town. In Normandy, the viking army had taken firm hold, and the predatory division of the entire country under the rule of the chieftain Rollo was in process of completion in 900. All over the islands, the Shetlands, the Orkneys, in Caithness (the northern tip of Scotland) and the Faroes, were Northern settlers; and Iceland —the very existence of which had been unknown half a century before—was now in the hands of landtakers wherever there was a fjord or a river that afforded a meadow for sheep herds or a fishing ground for salmon and herring. But other things must also be considered in addition to these settlements. A bold skipper had recently rounded Norway's desolate north coast and found his way to the White Sea, with its new hunting grounds. Still more adventurous was the tale of what had transpired in the East. The Danes had desolated the Wendish territory, where Jómsborg became their chief city, and founded new settlements along the coast of Prussia, as the Swedes did along the coasts of Esthland and Finland. Bands of Swedes sailed up Russia's rivers; along the Dnieper, the Dniester, and the Volga they went, now as peaceful merchants, now as vikings. They early made a permanent home in Novgorod. In 862, they founded a Scandinavian empire in Kiev; in 907, they were at the gates of Constantinople, and attempted

to take the imperial city. There seemed no limit to their talent for establishing new states. One half of Europe was spanned by their enterprise, and the remaining half seems not to have had any power that was superior to theirs. The kings of England and France could barely hold them off; Germany succeeded in fighting itself free in a single bloody victory.

In the following century, the tenth, there is an interval of peace after this eruption of energy. Men seem to rest and to be cautiously developing commonwealths; it is a constitutional period all the way from Iceland to Normandy. The age is marked by personal ability, manifested in trade, in warfare, in jurisprudence, in ecclesiastical affairs; but, from a national point of view, it is a period of ebb, following upon the tremendous rising of the tide. The vikings of Normandy accept the language and customs of the Franks; the settlers of Danelagh yield gradually and not without vigorous resistance to the English king and his more firmly fashioned state; even the settling of Ireland is an outcome of this ebb-tide, which draws the numerous host northward when the outflow to the south has been obstructed.

But at the turn of the century all this again changes. Suddenly, beginning about 980, all the seas are again filled with the ships of the vikings, and, as if at the call of a magic word, they all dash forth on greater tasks than before. Tradition tells that King

Svend Forkbeard at the funeral ale of his father swore an oath on the cup of memory that he would conquer England or die in the attempt. The whole epoch seemed to have made a vow to achieve great deeds in the spirit of the fathers. The final great period of the Viking Age sets in; all its remarkable scenes repeat themselves swiftly in the richest colors, as the viking army struggles with one of the greatest nations of Europe. Again we see armies dashing like flashes of lightning upon the enemy's country; peasants and burghers bringing their gold and silver to be weighed for ransom to buy off the Danes; a king, in shameful indecision, not knowing where to turn; a heroic young prince who is ever present where the danger is greatest; unsuspecting vikings treacherously cut down by the thousands at their nocturnal feast, while thousands of others are speeding over the sea in their long dragon ships to avenge their kinsmen. We see a cunning jarl who betrays his lord's life and his land's freedom; we see a priest suffering a martyr's death among the savage warriors, while a compassionate champion mercifully slays him to cut short his sufferings. Over the whole picture rises the form of Canute the Great, the born ruler, who is able, though a young man, to complete the task in which his father met his death, and who later brings the Scandinavians and Anglo-Saxons closer together so that they feel they are a single nation.

Then comes another rest period in the Viking Age:

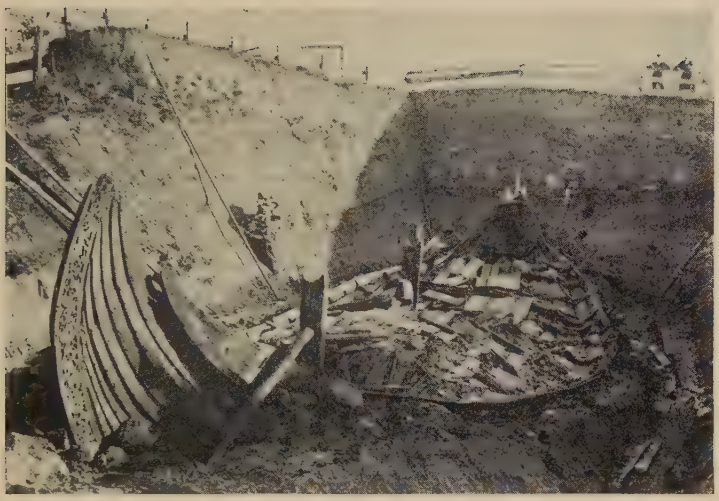
the Danish rule in England. The Danes live at peace with the nation their fathers have harried. Simultaneously the Scandinavian element in France has disappeared as a race. There is a *modus vivendi* in Ireland, under which the Scandinavians live in the merchant cities, while the Irish live in the open country. In Iceland there is no longer a frontier society but a distinct nation, with a highly developed jurisprudence and the beginnings of the saga literature. But the kernel of the great Northern fortress was falling to pieces. The Danish rule in England was dissolving; the Anglo-Saxons had once more gained the upper hand; and soon the Duke of Normandy came with his hosts of knights to break the power of England and devastate the Danish regions. In the East, the viking state had fused with the numerically superior Slavic race; the name "Russian" passed from the Scandinavian rulers and became that of the realm of Kiev and the subsequent Russian Empire. Thus the realms of conquest that had been established in foreign countries were wiped out, and the Scandinavian populations receded to their former boundaries, augmented only by the addition of the Western Isles and some of the coastal regions of the Baltic. Like so many other great national movements—the Crusades and the Mongolian empires—this epoch also appears to have run out in the sand. Yet its historical consequences can be pointed

out in many fields. Let us consider here its consequences for Scandinavia itself.

In its origin and driving force, this movement was a tremendous expansion of the life-force of the race. Its presupposition was a people not only acquainted with maritime affairs, but possessing courage to venture forth, ability to make far-reaching plans, and a gift of keen observation, always ready to find the adversary's weak points. These powers seemed to grow with the increase of their tasks and the broadening of their horizon. Taken together, they produced a feeling of superiority and invincibility. The compass of the world was multiplied many times. The shut-in valley dweller had felt the world of trolls and monsters, whom man might not tempt, to be close at hand. The boundaries of this world now widened immensely, and the viking pursued his horizon, directing his course over the sea, though the keel of his boat might break the back of a mermaid, or ascending to the cave of the Giants in the farthest North, to see whether this adventure were really so dangerous. It is true, the ancient terror remained in his soul, imparting the proper tension for the audacious venture; but at the same time his inborn self-assurance and matter-of-factness grew into a conscious emphasis on the tangible and reasonable, into that "faith in their own power and strength" which

the vikings professed—in spite of all gods and trolls and mighty realms.

Still more remarkable was the power of organization shown in the viking expeditions. Fleets comprising hundreds of ships were gathered without any appointed leader; seven, nine, fifteen, or even a greater number of "kings" are named as chieftains of the Scandinavians, and numerous sons of jarls and powerful peasants were no doubt each in charge of his own ship. "We are all equal," are the words placed by the Norman legend in the mouth of vikings as a reply to the Frankish messenger who inquired for their leader. Yet all these individual wills subordinated themselves to a common decision; obedient to their self-given laws, the vikings sailed to victory over the great kings of the West and their unruly vassals. Voluntary association attained its fairest blossoming among these tribes. If one lacked the support of a brother, a comrade would step in as a "foster-brother" or "sworn stall-brother" in his place. Instead of the local social structure based on neighborhood and kinship, the crew on a certain ship would constitute themselves a community, often with customs and laws of their own. Jómsborg on the Wendish coast became a great viking society cemented by certain laws: duty of vengeance, equal division of booty, exclusion of women from the citadel. As merchants also, the Scandinavians associated themselves in large guilds for mutual assistance or



THE OSEBERG SHIP

supposed to date from about 800 A.D., as it was when unearthed at the Oseberg Farm in Vestfold, Norway, in 1904

CARVINGS

on Danish Rune Stones from the Later Viking Age

revenge, or in "fellowships" (*félag*, i.e., community ownership of goods) to assure themselves of coöperation and funds for operation. Brotherhood means a great deal in this epoch; it means as much as the fidelity of retainers meant to an older generation.

The Viking Age caused many talents to expand; encouragement was afforded to everything requiring intelligence and courage, such as military strategy, trade, seafaring, and knowledge of the external world and the facts of nature. No doubt many less desirable qualities were also developed. Bloodthirstiness and cruelty were pronounced characteristics of the age that seem very repellent to us. No doubt these traits existed before, but the life of the vikings probably increased rather than decreased them. At times we meet with harryings that assume the most savage forms. All living creatures are slain: warriors, women, old men, and children. The men of that age found pleasure in a battle-ground filled with corpses. Once, in Ireland, Danes and Norwegians had striven against each other for supremacy, and the Danes had been victorious. Irish messengers who reached them after the battle saw that they had kindled their bivouac fire amongst the corpses, and had impaled dead bodies with the spit so as to expose them to the fire, whereupon the bodies burst so that the entrails fell out. "Why do ye aught so horrible?" said the Irish. "Had the others conquered they had done the same to us," replied the Danes. In addition to cruelty,

gluttony in food and drink was common, as well as lack of self-control with regard to women. Ugly evidences of the crudeness and greed for gold common in frontier societies were here apparent.

But there are also evidences of an opposite trend; though we encounter it chiefly in the world of poetry, this ideal must have been present in reality as well. We see small societies, crews of a single ship, banded together under rules that demand of their numbers the exercise of stern will power. Not only is it required that they give evidence of courage and fortitude, but they must refrain from strong drink, and take no woman to wife without "purchasing her with bridal gift," as the saying went. Occasionally one encounters incidents showing compassion for the weak, as in the case of the two guards of Saint Olaf's ship, who could not bear the cries by night of the captured Danish men and women, and who released them all, though it almost cost them their own lives.

If we measure the Viking Age by the standard of morality in our time, we shall find crude selfishness constantly trampling on values of a spiritual kind; yet it ill becomes us to make too loud a boast of morality when we recall what the viking policy of our own age has achieved in South Africa and China. In order to understand the Viking Age we must remember that foreigners and thralls were hardly considered as possessing the rights of men,

and that only countrymen were regarded as fellow-beings in the full sense of the word. In this relation, the Viking Age recognized other forms of justice than that of physical violence. Respect for individuals existed, and it became stronger and stronger now that so many persons separated themselves from their kinsmen. The position of women advanced considerably, in spite of the fact that the viking activities proper must have tended in the opposite direction. In the new settlement of Iceland, women obtained easier divorce than in any of the older societies. In Denmark—in this respect somewhat more advanced than the other Scandinavian countries—they obtained the right of inheritance before the close of the Viking Age. Possibly it was the contact with southern civilizations that brought about this change. But the figure of the capable and imperious woman is one that is characteristic of the Viking Age. In Iceland we have Aud, a king's widow from the Western islands who, when she took land, gave dwellings and work to all her descendants; in Denmark we have Thyra Danebod. The large number of women named on the rune stones of the tenth century indicates the importance of women in the community of the time.

This feminine aspect of the Viking Age is in distinct contrast with the actual life of the vikings; neither commercial enterprise nor harrying trips could have given women this prominent place; but

we are here confronted with another phase of the Viking Age. The movement provided a safety valve for the escape of the warlike elements in the population; it was a great blood-letting for the overrestless forces in a fermenting society. This blood-letting took place in the ninth century, and therefore we find the tenth century presenting a peaceful development that is all the more striking. Danish rune stones picture a society that was far removed from the spirit of the viking expeditions. The good peasant and his capable housewife are lauded: "Happy are they who plowed and sowed when they were young," we learn here. Such figures are found all over the North; rich peasants whose life work was first and foremost in their farm, which they cultivated and extended with the aid of their housecarls, thralls, and franklins. By the side of every old village, there were new settlements of peasants in ever larger numbers; these were called "*torp*" or "*bol*" when in the common pasturage, "*röd*" when in forest clearings. Desolate regions and steep rocky valleys were settled; the population boundaries for the Scandinavian peoples were advanced many miles to the north, while simultaneously they advanced westward to Iceland, and to all the smaller islands. The age was quite conscious of the contrast between these two elements: the constructive and the destructive forces.

The Icelanders formulated this contrast in their first two land-takers. Leif was the viking type with

his victories, his Irish thralls—whom he obliged even to draw the plow—his harshness, his denial of God, and his confidence in his own strength; Ingolf was the peasant who tilled the soil and worshiped God. Leif was slain by his own thralls; Ingolf lived on to be the ancestor of the dwellers in that region. We find the same dual traits in the Norwegian royal line, an alternation of peaceful and warlike kings. Danish songs like the Ingjaldskvædi also suggest the same contrast.

The entire saga literature of Iceland is a picture of these restless elements that consumed themselves, while the thoughtful and sedate men adjusted disputes and pronounced justice; the period of physical struggle in the sagas was declining, but law and litigation continued to exist.

This was the great blood-letting of the Viking Age. Eager for gold and fame, the warlike men set forth; many fell on foreign shores under the swords of Christians or of their own kinsmen; others were swallowed by the waves or destroyed by the pestilences that hovered in the corpse-filled wake of armies; some became competent rulers, because the new tasks awakened all their energies; and the homeland could breathe more freely, for there was more room for expansion within.

There was, in the Viking Age, a constant fluctuation between these opposites, the love of work and the lust for destruction; peace and restlessness; un-

bridled enjoyment and stern control of the senses in order to pursue an ethical goal. As a result, it was an age of endless possibilities and of rapid transformations. It was a springtime, when the ice cracked and broke while plants were already growing; many young shoots were frozen or crushed under foot, but the earth was rich enough to permit new plants to grow.

In addition to developing their own powers, the Northmen were also susceptible to influences from the many new elements with which they came in contact. It is impossible to say how much was due to inherent capabilities, and how much to the absorption of foreign ideas, or to a deflection of native tendencies into new channels under the compulsion of new conditions. Two great forces met them: one, the entire material and civic culture which had been inherited by southern regions from classical antiquity, and which the nations resulting from the Migrations were now seriously beginning to utilize; the other, Christianity and the Church, in the form in which the Scandinavian came in contact with them. It was the wealth of the South that lured the viking; he captured weapons, jewels, and garments, harried regions rich in wine, intoxicated himself in seaports and camps whenever a fair-sized cargo of wine was offered for sale. Soon luxuries of every kind were acquired, even Arab leather saddles and the silks of the Orient. But the Northman was an apt pupil; he

not only stole, he also imitated. He learned to build fortresses and form a testudo, to imitate the high-prowed warships, the galleys of the South, in his own dragon ships; he learned to plan cities and order a state. A new goal for the ruler's power arose, maintaining itself throughout the period unchanged; this was the figure of Charlemagne, "Carolus Magnus." Even during his lifetime, in the families of Northern kings in the West, men began to call their sons Karlus or Magnus; whenever a Magnus subsequently succeeds to one of the Northern royal seats, this is a victory of the Carolus Magnus ideal. A kingship with external power, internal peace and order, and moral elevation, stands as the highest goal of princely ambition.

As the viking king moves in the direction of the Carolus Magnus ideal, the viking warships are transformed into merchant ships. At the beginning of the Viking Age, they set forth on bloody expeditions; at the end of the Viking Age, Scandinavian merchant towns have arisen along all the coasts of northern Europe from Novgorod to Bristol, Limerick, and Dublin. The Atlantic Ocean, the North Sea, and the Baltic Sea, formerly bare of ships, have now been absorbed into the realm of world trade. Scandinavian merchant families in the coastal towns continue for some time to be among the foremost in the establishment of England's future greatness on the sea. Consciously or unconsciously, the Scandinavians acquire

the handicrafts and art of foreign peoples. They adopt a metal currency. Water-mills begin to supplant hand-mills in Denmark; the corn-drying oven and the threshing flail are of foreign origin.

Nay, where it was least expected, a tremendous power for change had come in with the gold and silver that predatory vikings had brought home from their raids on foreign coasts. These metals had much enhanced the greed of the individual, even when still far off, luring as a distant treasure to be seized. "Every man wants to own gold, to his death day," says the young hero in the lay. Europe appeared to this age as a veritable Gníta heath, where the dragon was guarding the treasures of centuries. And once the gold was won and borne home on heavy-laden ships, it operated as a charm which transformed everything. For blood-vengeance was substituted a fine paid in money. "It is hard to find one whom I can trust, for a brother's corpse is sold for burnished gold." Ancestral homes were sold for money, in order that the viking chieftian might buy more land.[1] Before the viking had even comprehended the Roman Law, gold

[1] An example of a landed proprietor of this type is Hárek of Tjotta, Eyvind Skaldaspillir's son; he acquired wealth in a trip to Finland (Bjarmaland), and drove away all small peasants from the island, where he then erected a great farmstead with eighty housecarls; he then also laid claim to the fishing grounds of a neighbor Grankel, lost in the litigation, but burned down the neighbor's house, wherefor he was outlawed by Saint Olaf and subsequently became one of the leaders in the movement to drive the king out of the country.

brought about the introduction of the law of the individual and a corresponding redistribution of the land. In the hand of the chieftain about one hundred sections of the old peasant land might perhaps be united, and the captured foreign serfs had to clear additional arable land in the common possessions. Such was the gradual transition from the ancient life to that of the later Middle Ages. The tendency had begun already with the earliest coast raids and became stronger with an increase in the conscious observation and comparison of foreign customs. The acceptance of Christianity was for many persons rather an assimilation of European life than an expression of religious enthusiasm.

IRELAND played a peculiar rôle for the Scandinavians in the Viking Age. The Irish culture differed considerably from the general European-Roman civilization; its influence on the North, as well as the Northern influence on Ireland itself, remains in many ways a thing apart.

It is true, Christianity had penetrated to this westernmost land of Europe; but in countless other respects Ireland had remained outside the spread of civilization, so that the peculiarly Celtic culture had had time to develop in its richest and most unique form. The Irish people were divided into a great number of petty tribes or clans; certain kings forced the

others to pay tribute, but a real state formation did not take place. The Irish were a nation of cattle-breeders, without trading towns, commerce, or money. The unit of value was first of all the cow, and in the second place the thrall-maiden; three cows were worth one female slave. The laws and the social life were involved in a great mass of superstitions and thousand-year-old customs; many things were "taboo" to the members of the various castes, particularly to the kings, and it was the duty of the priestly caste, the Druids, to keep track of all these prohibitions and charms. This was a curious development, and yet by no means a condition of stagnation. Christianity had taken root very early, and had produced small hermit-like monastic settlements, which were the leading force in the Irish Church. They were in a sense the heirs of the struggle waged by the ancient Druids on evil spirits with the aid of conjuring, and were at the same time consecrated to an inner religious life and an external missionary activity. A curious, adventurous asceticism drove hermit societies—twelve monks and an abbot, corresponding in number to the Redeemer and His Disciples—to the outermost islands, in one case even to distant Iceland, before any other human foot had stepped upon the island.

Still more interesting, however, was the national poetic life. The poets and narrators who worked upon its development constituted an entire class; they were

honored by being permitted to live in the king's house and endowed with certain privileges. Hundreds of heroic legends and historical tales, or adventurous expeditions to unknown regions, constituted the minstrel's material. The Irish skald narrated his stories in prose, but when his mood became elevated, he passed into poetry, melodious, colorful, and entrancing. He had the ability to single out that which was impressive, and at the same time an incredibly fine observation of the visible expressions of life, one might almost say the physiological conditions of life. Let me point out a few examples, connected with the great legendary hero of Ireland, Cuchullin. When the rage of battle comes upon Cuchullin on receiving news that the league of young men has fallen at the hands of the enemy, his one eye recedes into his head, while the other bulges forth; his mouth is drawn over toward his ear, and the sinews of his forehead are stretched taut from the neck on; his heart beats like the barking of a chained hound; every joint and limb quakes like a tree in the storm or a reed in the torrent, and each muscle protrudes like a clenched human fist. Or, let us take the incident in which he undertakes to lift from the ground the royal stronghold with all that are in it. "Then came the rage upon him. A blood-drop gathered at the root of each of his hairs and sucked the hair into his head, so that he was above as black as one short-shorn to look upon; he revolved like a millstone and then stretched out

his body so that the foot of a full-grown man could have been inserted anywhere between his ribs. Then his companion and protecting spirits came to aid him; he lifted the building into the air, and set it down on its former site." Very impressive also is the picture from his early youth, when the berserker rage comes upon him for the first time in battle. He is thrown into a tub of water, but the water boils so that the staves burst, and the water gushes forth; he is thrown into a second tub, which also boils and bursts; only in the third tub does the water fail to boil—and the hero has cooled off. But with all this, the poetry of Ireland possesses a wonderful richness of color, fostered by Ireland's fruitful earth and gilded by its sun bursting many-colored through the clouds. It is filled with admiration for women's beauty, "white as snow, black as coal, and red as blood" with rosy feet in silver-embroidered shoes. It rejoices in the golden red cheeks of the apple and the delicate jingling of the divine silver-branch; it expresses longing for the sea, where the horses of Manannan, ruler of the ocean, dash along with foaming white mane, and also love of distant shores, where the "Land of the Undying" shines in the last rays of the setting sun.

Christianity itself further enhanced the resources of this poetic world; there is a curious interaction between the divine power and the ancient heroes or creatures of nature. The Irish skald preserved all this; his historical writing became a splendid presentation

of the tumult and confusion of battle; his divine myths became romantic struggles of antiquity and fairy tales. But the skald was not only a poet; he was also a scholar. A number of masters of this type are represented as seated and addressing questions to test each other's wisdom. They ask concerning the precedence of dynasties, the origin of social classes from Lug or from Dagde, the pagan god of art and knowledge, who is considered the first great king (Rîg-Môr) of Ireland. They ask concerning the origins of places and names, or as to the most remote future of Ireland. When a young poet has succeeded in driving an older poet into a corner on these subjects, he has also succeeded in winning his place as court skald or over-skald—and even the king may be obliged to leave his throne if another delivers a more correct judgment than he. Often the master who has been outwitted will bestow even his name on his adversary.

This is the curious social structure that suffered one of the first great onslaughts of the Viking Age. The first attack was in the form of harrying expeditions against monastic islands and coasts. In 839, the Norwegian vikings had a highly talented leader, Turgeis. Turgeis established the city of Dublin, which subsequently became the principal center for the vikings in the West. He built strongholds in the interior of the country, drove forth the abbot from Armagh, the most venerable cathedral in Ireland, and appointed himself as a pagan *godi* at this sanctuary,

while his wife Otta sat upon the altar of the cathedral at Clonmacnois as the priestess of the Asir. The Irish obtained a slight respite owing to the murder of Turgeis and disputes between Danish and Norwegian vikings. But the Scandinavian and Celtic elements began to mingle both in trade and by marriage, with a resulting mixed population; a great number of vagrant elements cast aside their Christian baptism and sought to participate in the more lucrative occupations of the vikings. In 850, the "foreign Irishmen" for the first time appeared as a mighty host of robbers, which, however, was soon dispersed. New race mixtures were constantly taking place; thus the entire population of the Isle of Man consisted of "foreign Irishmen"; even the names on the island still present evidences of a mingling of Celtic and Scandinavian elements within the same home. How great was the extent of this admixture also in the Scandinavian countries may be judged by the names of the settlers of Iceland, among whom a not inconsiderable number bore names that were either entirely or half Celtic, not to mention the fact that Irish thralls were imported as slaves and later gained their freedom.

A poem from this period, the language of which is veritably larded with Irish terms, and the content of which presupposes a Celtic mental origin, gives us an idea of the stage of civilization attained by the vikings of the North. This poem is included in the Elder Edda, and is called Rígsthula (i.e., the enum-

erated verses of Ríg). It deals with the origins of social classes. The god Ríg, who is old and wise, pays a visit to "Great-grandfather" and "Great-grandmother," then to "Grandfather" and "Grandmother," and finally to "Father" and "Mother." Everywhere the housewife gives birth to a son after his visit; and thus the three essential units come into being: Thrall, Karl (peasant), and Jarl. Thrall is of swarthy hue, with wrinkled skin on his hands, thick ankles, and coarse fingers; his face is wide and large, his back bent, and his heels long. As he grows to manhood, he finds his joy in hard toil: he drags home the brushwood, digs peat, manures the fields, and feeds the pigs. "Thrall-wife" (Thír) comes stalking on her long legs, scars on the soles of her bare feet, sunburn on her arms. They join forces and bring up their children; from them arises the race of thralls. But in the peasant home, where Grandfather had lived and fashioned tools and Grandmother had spun, a red-cheeked, red-haired boy was born; they poured water over him and called him Karl. He grew up, learned to tame the ox, guide the plow, and build the house. A bride was brought to him in a cart, her garment of goatskin, keys hanging at her belt, and adorned with a bridal veil; from them arose the race of peasants. But in the hall where Father and Mother lived, a child with light hair was born, its skin of delicate hue, its glance as sharp as a serpent's; they called him Jarl. Jarl proceeded to bend the bow, twist

the string, ride horses and train hounds, swim the sea and swing the sword. Ríg came from his forest to teach him wisdom, gave him his name, and recognized him as his son. Erna, slim-handed daughter of Hersi (chieftain of the peasants), was brought to him in a wagon and given to him as wife; from them arose the race of chieftains. Now the poem begins a new tale. Jarl's sons grow up; they tame horses and wield their spears. But the youngest, young Kon, pursues aims of his own; he learns the wisdom of runes, to save the life of men, to blunt swords, to pacify the sea, and slake the fire. He understands the language of birds, and has learned to appease a sorrowful mind. Kon enters into a conflict of runes with Rígjarl, and wins over him; thus he acquires the name Ríg. Young Kon rides through brush and woods; he discharges arrows at birds. Then a crow, speaking from a branch, says to him: "Why wilt thou, young Kon, ride and shoot after birds? Kings Dan and Danp have splendid halls, and better heritage than thou." Then Kon sets forth, he rouses battle, stains the field red, chooses the slain; he wins himself a realm.

This poem is commonly considered one of the lays of gods in the Elder Edda, which is wrong in a way, as it does not belong to Scandinavian but to Celtic mythology. Ríg is the ancient great king (Rîg-Môr) of the Irish, the god Dagde, from whom the three classes of society take their origin, and who also is the source of all human wisdom and ingenuity. The

double paternity—an earthly and a heavenly father—is, like other fantastic modes of conception, a favorite theme in Irish heroic poetry. The contest of wisdom with the subsequent change of name is a genuine trait of Celtic social life and legend. On the other hand, the human characters in Rígsthula are striking examples of pure Scandinavian types. Jarl and Karl (peasant) are types of the dolichocephalic viking, while the toiling Thrall is a brachycephalic type; there is no Irish admixture here. The division into social classes is purely Scandinavian; the ideal is the warrior's life. Kon the Young (*konung*, king) is as pronounced a type of the viking life and the viking kingship as can be imagined; the bird on the bough in the silent forest, whose speech is as a summons for great deeds, for "conquering a realm," is the same voice that was heard by hundreds of young heroes. It is the viking life, but it is not the picture of smoking homesteads and reveling berserkers that we find depicted in the chronicles of the West; it is the true Northern view of royal qualities and royal aims. There is a curiously clear consciousness that not strength and readiness with arms constitute a great leader, but powers of mind and domination over nature, including their application for warlike as well as for peaceful, generally useful, purposes. The poem reveals to us the view of life and of kingship held at the climax of the Viking Age, the tenth century, a period when Scandinavian and Westerner

were about to blend; even the dynasty founded by Kon the Young traces its origin back partly to Erna (Erin, Ireland) and partly to Dana, King Dan's

Example of Norse-Irish Style of Decoration Carving from Urnæs Church, Norway, about 1100 A.D.

daughter. It has recently been suggested that the home of the poem was the Isle of Man, where the ruling dynasty had this dual origin, being partly from

Embroidery on the Garment of a Danish Chieftain, about 950

Denmark and partly from Ireland, and where a Scandinavian (chiefly Norwegian) element was distinctly mingled with the older Celtic population. But, however great the admixture of foreign ideas

that is revealed in the poem, the conduct and view of life presented by it proves the power and independence of the Scandinavian element.

In other fields, the influence of the Irish on the Scandinavian may be seen even more clearly. A new art, a new decorative style, forced its way in and gained a foothold; both were Irish. The barbarous forms of beasts which were accepted as a heritage of the period of Migrations, and which were later dissolved and confused, were driven to the wall by a type of ornamentation that played with lines in a charming and yet audacious manner, in loops and curves that were interwoven like rings of armor, or danced side by side like the beating of soft waves. After their absorption by the Scandinavians, these ornaments assumed a grimmer aspect; heads of beasts with dragon bodies were developed to a greater extent than among the Irish, and produced a strikingly impressive effect. Not only in the Viking Age, but long after, all of Europe owed much to Irish ornament; but nowhere else did it make such headway as in the North. Imitations were made not only of Irish metal work, but the

Carving in Norse-Irish Style, from Urnæs Church

Scandinavians also learned to hew soft sandstone or limestone with a surface of varied and striking pictures: war and the chase, Valhalla and Christianity, in motley mixture. This Irish art produced a new national art in the North, which spans the transition period and the first centuries of our Middle Ages. Norwegian wood-carvings and a great number of Swedish rune stones still bear witness to this unusual talent for the natural adornment of surfaces.

The new seed obtained in Ireland was fruitful also in the realm of poetry, though it cannot be traced quite so definitely as in the case of concrete antiquities. As opposed to the older taciturn and plastic style of poetry, a new style burst forth, full of color, movement, and vim. There was something of this new style in the prophetic poem Völuspá; but it is purest and most pronounced in the youngest and greatest of the lays concerning Helgi Hundingsbani, whose life of rulership and military campaigns were verily a counterpart of the last generation of the Viking Age, the period of Canute the Great. Here we have ships with raised sails in the roaring storm, waves breaking about their bows, as if the world were about to perish. Or, take the passage in which Odin's maids come riding to the battlefield: "Then a bright light flashed over Logafjall, but flashes descended from the brightness; he saw tall helmeted maids ride, their byrnies speckled with blood, and fire shone from the tips of the spears."

There can hardly be any doubt that the greatest change which took place in Scandinavian literature, the transition from the poetic form to that of an artistic polished prose, is also due to Irish influence. For example, we meet with tales of expeditions which have the same curious goal that is found in certain Irish tales: "the Land of the Undying" (immortality, or, in Icelandic, Ódáinsakr) and its population of virgins. In its larger aspects, the situation may be formulated as follows. There is a semicircle in the North that is most susceptible to the Irish culture: Norway and the Western Islands, including Iceland. Here the literary form that is so peculiar to the Irish —the heroic saga with occasional lyric poems—dominates to the end of the Middle Ages. Common to both the ancient Irish and the later Northern literature are the alternate treatment of the natural and the supernatural, the careful dwelling on details, and, particularly, a sense of the bodily expressions of mental conditions; and without a doubt the Scandinavian has learned these things from the Irish. There is a curious mutual influence at work in the Viking Age. The Scandinavians enter this period with an epic poetry and emerge from it with prose narratives of the lives of heroes, with lyrical components interlarded in verse. The Irish entered the period with these mingled prose and lyric elements and emerged from it with an epic poetry closely corresponding to some of the Eddic lays, the backward-looking poems.

It would appear that the two nations influenced each other in opposite directions; each gave to the other what the other had not known before.

Another form of poetry which does not seem to have escaped Irish influence is the artistic skaldic *drápa*. Its complicated system of rhymes recalls, particularly in the oldest form in which it is known to us, Irish poems; and the first known skald—who lived at the time of the first great settlement in Ireland—Bragi Boddason, had an Irish wife and uses at least one Irish word in his Ragnarsdrápa.

Considered as a whole, this Irish element in Scandinavian culture is a phenomenon in itself, which does not coincide with the principal current of the Christian movement as it passes over Europe. It appears more as an enrichment and expansion of the native North European stage of civilization than as a part of the new trend accompanying the introduction of Christianity. In so far as it swept away a portion of the ancient heritage, this tendency might have made a breach for the entrance of the new main current; and furthermore certain Christian impulses did emanate from Ireland. But in at least equal measure this Irish influence contributed to the production of a special civilization which somewhat impeded the rapid absorption of the North into Christian Europe.

The conditions and tendencies of the Viking Age found their expression in the heroic poetry. The cycle

of legends connected with Starkad the Old contains a few of the older legendary features (the aging warrior who eggs on his countrymen at Ingjald's wedding to resume their feud, the hardy warrior whose severed head bites the dust or whose body continues to fight after the head has been hewn off). But, while making use of these familiar incidents, the Viking Age produced a body of poetry that was all stamped with its own image.

The action of the Lay of Ingjald begins at the royal seat of Leire. Ingjald's court servants rush in and out with delicate dishes; they pay no attention to the old man who sits in the lowest seat in the hall. Then he raises his voice and recalls that he once served King Frodi and sat at the head of the Danish king's hall. He has come now in order to see what are the customs in the royal seat of the Skjöldungs: does Ingjald remember that he has to avenge his father's death, or thinks he only to gorge his stomach? He recalls that he parted with Frodi full of evil premonitions; had he but been with the king then, Svertting, the treacherous Saxon chieftain, would have been slain—or he would himself have fallen by the side of his master! The queen, Ingjald's Saxon wife, attempts to soothe the warrior with the gift of a gold-embroidered headband; but he casts it from him with scorn of foreign customs in garb and food, mocks Ingjald whose fingers are seeking tidbits in the stuffing of birds, and lauds the ancient days when he ate

raw ham and refrained from sweet intoxicating drink as a member of Haki's Viking host. The old man's mind seems about to wander in senile reminiscences of the past, but suddenly he again comes to the point which he has in mind. In those days, no man would have accepted money for his father's death; never would a son have sat at the same table with his father's murderer. He admonishes Ingjald in the most emphatic words: when others sing of the great deeds of kings, Starkad will hide his face in his cloak ashamed, for there is naught to sing of Frodi's son; the fame of others can only become a bane to his consciousness; he will never join with noble men, but will hide in the arms of a foreign woman, and be a ready victim to the greed of the Saxons who wish to take his kingdom. Or—he must avenge his father! Ingjald suddenly springs to his feet, cuts down the Saxons—his wife's seven brothers, who sit at his board—and, on Starkad's advice, declares that he will put his wife away, so that the race of traitors shall not flourish in Denmark. While the thralls are still dragging the corpses of the slain from the hall, the ancient warrior addresses his departing words to the generation in whose destinies he has this once intervened. He reminds them of the life of warriors on the sea, which was the hard school of his youth, and casts a glance of contempt at the men who now seek to advance themselves by ingenious litigations and financial transactions, who curl their hair

and aim to please their palates. They will all some day tremble for their lives, while he who has fought his way honestly through life may look death straight in the eye.

Such is this poem, the first conscious glorification of the viking life. Its origin falls in the period when the great movement had come to an ebb; society was settling down to peaceful occupations, and the whole epoch was hardly more than a great memory of youth. We have reached the middle of the tenth century. The ferment of old and new elements was at its highest point; new habits of life and new fashions were the earmarks of the foreign invasion. By the end of the century the golden headband that Starkad scorned and threw back at the queen had already become a common accessory to the festive costume of a rich Iceland peasant. It was these new customs, this display and glitter, and the effeminacy of the South that the poet denounced in his lay, and against which he invoked the ancient greatness of soul. At the close of the century a counter-current had already set in against the new customs, a heroic spirit trained on the hard planks of ships, and ready to participate in a new great Viking movement. It was just such a situation that the poet wished to produce.

Hard pressed by the oncoming innovations, the soul of the heroic legends once more gathered all its strength, and formulated a declaration that strength

of will and greatness in action are the true goal of man. For the first time, men became aware that the viking comradeship was a great achievement. Moderation, even complete abstinence from intoxicating drink, was praised as evidence of a strong mind conquering low desires. The ancient ideals of the nation were fused with the specific forms of life in the Viking Age. Yet the Lay of Ingjald rises superior to the merely typical work of its age by reason of a specific idea: the hero of the ancient period, familiar with the great deeds of the fathers, reminds the younger generation of the precious heritage to which it has succeeded, and which it should preserve and maintain—a character and a thought later found recurring in the historian Saxo, and in the modern Danes Oehlenschläger and Grundtvig.

But the influence of the Starkad conception was felt most strongly in the ancient epoch itself. After one poet had conceived this thought in a moment of emotion, all the other poets sang it after him. One of them created a female character of the type of Ingjald, frivolous and pleasure-seeking, yet possessing the stuff that had made the strength of her fathers. This character was Helga, a king's daughter, the wanton of a base goldsmith, who had enticed her by his wooing and his cheap gewgaws. Starkad—now represented as the godfather of the king's children—belabored the goldsmith's back with his sword and

chastised the king's daughter with slaps in the face and hard words, until the pride of her race was reborn in her. In another work, this time in prose, we see a Starkad whose entire activity is devoted to showing men how a bold warrior must act. He engages in single combat with an entire host of berserkers, lies half naked in the snow, and, when he is wounded, will accept no aid until he finds a peasant's son who is worthy to be permitted to give this aid. This narration is the last form assumed by the Starkad legend proper, by the actual Starkad motive of the cycle. The type of the ancient warrior has been perfectly developed; he wanders about as a prophet of hardiness and courage, and always points to himself as the living pattern.

This Starkad ideal was quickly disseminated over the entire North, borne on the wings of viking ships. For the first time a heroic figure had been created out of the fullness of contemporary life. Each section of Scandinavia added its own element to the situation. Swedish vikings had him blaze the trail in the bitter combat in the East which was actually being blazed by the contemporaries of the poet. On Norwegian soil, a tragic issue was interpolated; Starkad was tempted by the contemporary lust for gold, and treacherously slew his own lord. There is no longer—as in the Danish version—merely an expression of the power of the mind over a wrinkled exterior, but—in Norwegian lays—a confusion of

great and petty, of good and bad, which imparts character to the Starkad figure. And now the idea gains ground that Starkad is half of heroic race and half of Giant lineage. Starkad sits in the king's hall, mute with remorse over his unhappy deed, while the retainers laugh at the stranger, mock him for his furrowed skin and wolf's hair, and because he is a skald who cannot recite songs. He does not raise his voice in reply; he acknowledges that he has deserved their scorn; he feels the brand of the Giant race on his body and the curse which is upon him.

This dual development of the Starkad figure at the close of the Viking Age is very curious. A Danish poem, faithful to the ancient spirit of the heroic legend, but more cheerful in its view of life, makes him the expression of all that is splendidly human. A Norwegian-Icelandic poem, which sounds the demonic depths in the life of man, mingles good and bad elements in the same character, for it is just this cleavage—this dramatic contrast—that is characteristic of the poetry of this age. We feel that the life of the Scandinavian peoples is about to divide into various tendencies, and that these will not again unite until late, or rather, that they will not unite at all. Yet there are powerful common traits: there is this warrior figure, with the high ideals of the heroic age, who nevertheless is reminiscent of and somewhat apart from the actual heroic life; for this figure is not directly connected with the ancient warrior's

emphatically personal relation of fidelity and revenge, but is permeated with the central idea of a great exertion of will, proceeding to deeds of prowess in a world-embracing theater. In this sense, Starkad is the true picture of the Viking Age.

VI. PAGANISM AND CHRISTIANITY

TWO elements entered the lives of the Scandinavians through their contact with Western Europe. One was a civilization derived chiefly from Mediterranean antiquity. The other was Christianity. The influence of the ancient civilization had been felt in the North for centuries, though it had not been so strong as it now became; for no sooner did the Viking Age open, than the influence of this civilization made itself felt through many channels, open or secret. Christianity, considered as a whole, was new; its acceptance must have been a sharp break with all the traditional habits. Its adoption therefore did not take place until late, whether it was received as a concomitant of all the rest of the new civilization, or by reason of some spiritual pressure from foreign quarters, such as a missionary activity.

Though Christianity was quite different from the traditional worship of the gods in Scandinavia, we should not make the mistake of assuming that it al-

ways meant a definite choice of one faith or another. Only a few distinctly dramatic episodes represent the pagans as all gathered in a single host, with all the Christians in another such host; thus in the Icelandic Althing, in the year 1000 A.D., where there was considerable possibility of a sudden civil war on the question of the introduction of Christianity. Whenever we deal with the development of ideas and with the inner life, we necessarily encounter an infinite number of shades of difference. No pagan in the tenth century, certainly no talented or receptive mind, could have been entirely uninfluenced by Christian ideas. Long before the strong blaze of Christianity appeared in the sky, its pale dawn could be seen on the horizon. We can trace the gradual spread of Christian burial customs, such as interment in coffins and the burning of candles. The custom of sprinkling the child with water when it was given its name seems to have been taken from the Christians. In lieu of such words as Valhalla and Hel, phrases such as "in this light and in the other" (the life on earth and the life in the beyond) were used; and though these expressions were less specific, their origin must have been among Christian peoples. The idea of a divine administration of justice, particularly of a retribution in the beyond, gained more and more in strength. About the middle of the tenth century, we encounter the remarkable figure of the Icelander Gisli Sursson, somewhat of a prophet, strongly impressed with a

sense of justice and the seriousness of life. In his restless nights—being an outlaw and subject to pursuit—he beheld dream-visions of the great ancestral hall in which his deceased relations were waiting for him, and of the Valkyrie who was to lead him into the hall; commissioned by "the lord of generations" (a sort of vague blending of Odin and the God of the Christians) she makes known to him the requirements he must fulfill in order to be well received in the life beyond: "Refrain from witchcraft and evil arts; pursue the good as the skalds teach; never be the first to slay; stir not a peaceful man to combat; help the blind; mock not the halt; attack not the armless!"

Throughout the Western colonies as well as in Iceland we encounter a sort of transitional religion, the faith in female creatures—sometimes divided into two hosts, spirits of light and spirits of darkness—who guide the destinies of men. In part these creatures resembled the pagan Valkyries or Fylgjir, in part they partook of Christian traits—as in the magic charm known as "Thrand's Credo" or the "Little Credo," which has lingered among the common people down to our day, and which contains the verse about the five angels of God that follow and protect each human being. In religious content these conceptions were quite vague; their significance lies in their reference—as in the visions of Gisli Sursson—to the struggle between good and evil, and in the possibility

of interpreting them as an expression of a loving and omnipotent will.

But there were also among the Scandinavians other persons who—unlike Gisli Sursson—did not content themselves with assuming a relation between the gods and the principles of ethics. They were attached by poetic habit to the ancient world of myth, and could not in their religious conceptions free themselves from the Asir and their life struggle; but they felt a desire to understand existence as a whole and to reconcile things long known with what they now learned concerning a divine ruler of a higher type, who would manifest himself upon earth. Among them was the greatest poetic genius of Scandinavia in the Viking Age. We do not know his name, nor can we say more concerning his home than that it was by the sea which bore the Northmen to foreign strands and served to carry the new ideas back to their ancient domicile. But he was a man who imbibed all these things, a man who could grasp the sorrows of this warlike life and yet dream of perfection; a singer who had listened reverently to the entrancing beauty of the Christian songs of the West concerning God's might, the destruction of the world, and its resurrection. This was the poet of Völuspá in the Elder Edda.

No pagan poet before him had ever attempted to present so tremendous a subject as the entire life on earth. The folk-myths, as is well known, did not

constitute a perfect cycle, illustrating the entire course of the universe. They were a luxuriant forest in which myths sprouted and died down, each of them expressing in itself the fundamental Scandinavian idea of a struggle between constructive and destructive forces; whenever a whole picture was presented, it was not a historical enumeration, but an immediate observation, such as the world ash-tree Yggdrasil, its roots gnawed by the serpents and watered by the Norns. Even the brooding poetic souls of the Viking period could do no more than permit each subject to cast an occasional gleam of light on other subjects. The poet who wrote Völuspá is the exception; he actually must have occupied a point of vantage whence he could review the entire world of the Asir.

It is not necessary to recount the action of the poem here. It expounds the interrelation of the myths, an exposition that is repeated in almost all the later treatments; it tells of the creation of the world by the gods and the first happy age, the fall from grace succeeded by a period of struggle and misfortune, the gradual oncoming of Ragnarök, and finally the rebirth to a life free from all distress, with a new earth and a Gimli thatched with gold.

The circumstances attending the composition of this poem—whether it resulted from Christian influences or arose from pagan conceptions—have given rise in the past quarter century to a sharp difference

of opinion between men of learning. Both parties have been somewhat in the wrong. It has been impossible to prove a purely pagan origin for its material and its view of life; on the other hand, those who have sought a Christian prototype for each specific feature have gone too far in the other direction. In its material, the poem contains far more of pagan mythology than of Christian conceptions; but the general color of existence and of the individual mythic traits reveals a view of life which, though it may not be Christian, has absorbed more Christian ideas than the poet seems to be aware of. The profound contrast between the suffering that fills all life as it is seen and lived, and the splendor that once existed on earth and may be regained through an immense destruction and an ensuing purification—this is the illumination of life which separates the poet from his ancient pagan foundations.

Of old was the age when Ymir lived;
Sea nor cool waves nor sand there were;
Earth had not been, nor heaven above,
But a yawning gap, and grass nowhere.

Then Bur's sons lifted the level land,
Mithgarth the mighty there they made;
The sun from the south warmed the stones of earth,
And green was the ground with growing leeks.

The sun, the sister of the moon, from the south
Her right hand cast over heaven's rim;

No knowledge she had where her home should be,
The moon knew not what might was his,
The stars knew not where their stations were.[1]

The gods, the hallowed powers, gather in the seats of judgment and ponder the administration of all the earth. To the shifting and unsteady lights of heaven, the sun and the moon, they assign fixed courses; they create dwarfs in the earth; and, finally, the three Asir —mighty and charitable—find on Midgard's strand two trees, to which they impart breath, motion, and warm blood; thus the race of man is created. We have here a richer and more beautiful presentation of a thought already familiar to the pagan hearers of the poem; namely, that a divine host, "the powers," at the beginning of all time shaped each thing and determined its use. On the other hand, the pagan was aware of many other things which the poet of Völuspá here ignores: grotesque conceptions of a world that has expanded abnormally after the fashion of Giants; of a huge Giant body that constitutes the arable land and the cliffs of the earth, surmounted by a skull vaulted over it as a sky and by all the "hard-minded clouds" that proceed from the brain of the primeval Giant. These features and many others have been discarded by the Völuspá poet; the domination of the divine power over the lifeless mass is stated with a definiteness that we find nowhere

[1] Bellows's translation.

else. This is new, not only from the religious, but also from the esthetic point of view. These young sons of gods who put lands in their proper places are suffused with a beauty which is far different from the uncouth proportions so characteristic of the greater part of the Northern world of myth. Even nature seems different. The customary myth does not recognize the existence of what we call nature; nature is translated into personifications. Now we suddenly are face to face with nature as such: sun and sea, strand and plants; the earth-sphere as such is a part of the great world-drama; the ocean roars, and the earth quakes; great masses of rock burst with loud report. Finally we perceive fire, not as a mythical creature or applied to some mythical usage, but fire licking its way over the tangible earth and, closely enveloped in smoke, rolling up to the sky. We see the sun turn black and the stars fall—a more strictly physical picture than the widespread popular myth of the pursuing sun-wolves. The entire conception of nature has shifted from a crude animistic polytheism to the point of view of the Christian world, namely, an acceptance of nature as it is and a conception of the forces in nature as a creative and guiding power concealed behind the scenes. Everywhere in the Middle Ages we find the poetry of nature arising in the wake of Christianity, developing out of its songs of creation and its longing for paradise.

We first meet the gods in their blessed existence on

the field of Ida, which is interrupted by the slaying of Gullveig. The Scandinavian element in this is the appearance of the Asir, who establish smithies and play table-games, as well as the triple repetition of the slaying of the gold-maiden. The Christian element is the name Ida-field, i.e., the Garden of Eden, and the general interpretation of life. Then ensues the curious degradation of the gods to a stage at which they are only the highest creatures of creation; they experience the same loss of power and purity as do men, while obscure forces of destiny, the Norns by the world ash-tree, assume actual control. The Asir have really declined; they are heroes, enterprising and radiant, but they do not have the reins of highest authority in their hands. And when the poet later depicts the gradual subsidence of the entire world into a general destruction—through Balder's death, the fettering of Loki, the multiplication of the brood of monsters eastward in the forest of iron—the Ragnarök motive has assumed a far more important place in life than it occupies elsewhere. While other poets consider the power of the gods and view Ragnarök as their background, the poet of Völuspá regards the downfall as something that has almost tangible existence, and sees a future splendor beyond the destruction. The Asir have thereby been degraded beneath the level of divinity; they have become mere heroes, demigods. The details have been distinctly subordinated to this general view. Thor appears but

a single time—as if in passing—before we see him fall at Ragnarök. Balder assumes the foreground; his death without defending himself, and the keen sense of his absence, are an introduction to the era under discussion. Beyond this "bloody god" who succumbs to the "sorrow-bringing spear" we may imagine we see the suffering Redeemer.

The preparation and execution of Ragnarök becomes the central point of the poem. Here the gifted poet works his will with oncoming hosts of Giants, restless Asir, a chaotic world, a huge diastrous conflict, until finally a desolate earth is devoured by fire and drops back into the sea. The scenes are so impressive, and advance with such energy, that the listener will scarcely be able to detect the Christian elements interpolated among the pagan myths: the moral contamination, the trumpet of doom, the sun and stars falling, the earth consumed by flames. The case is similar in the rebirth: the earth arises from the sea, becoming newly decked with green; there are eagles and salmon, hunting grounds and unsown fields; there is the return of Balder and the rule of the young gods. All this seems quite familiar to us; even Gimli's golden roof corresponds to Valhalla; and the coming of "the Mighty One" of course appears as a revelation of the destiny impending for the gods, a destiny that has long been supreme. It is only on close examination we find that this section—as well as the rest—is the result of indigenous ideas,

developed to adapt them to the Christian tendency, or at least to make possible the worship of a single god. The original pagan belief in immortality, a rebirth in the younger generation, has paled considerably, while blessedness and justice are now the sustaining ideas, and Gimli has borrowed its brightness from the New Jerusalem. But the element that serves best to burst the frame of paganism and proclaim the doctrine of a single God is that of the coming of the Mighty One to establish the realm.

The poet of Völuspá was a brooding and searching spirit, fostered by the Viking Age in its ferment. He sought to solve the problem of a combination of the traditional mythic world with the new Christian ideas. The result was the creation of a work full of beauty, inspiration, profundity. He was not engaged in an attempt to defend the doctrine of the Asir, nor to clothe the Christian truths in pagan garb. The poem is the independent effort of a thoughtful man to arrive at an understanding of the innermost laws of existence.

In the subsequent ages, this poem enjoyed more prestige than any other. It was placed at the head of the Elder Edda, and later mythologists have used it both as a fundamental outline and for its point of view. We seem also to feel it in the stone images of the Viking Age, while, in the realm of poetry, even Christian skalds attempt to echo it in their works. Viewed from the religious point of view, it succeeded

THREE VIEWS OF THE JELLING RUNE STONE
Raised by King Harald Bluetooth in honor of his father, Gorm the Old, and his mother, Thyra Danebod. The third picture is the oldest representation of Christ in Scandinavia

in approximating the pagan to the Christian circle of ideas. At the same time, however, it had also another effect. The poet of Völuspá draws the myths of the Asir into the general circle of the splendor of Gimli and the Mighty God; these elements are consequently permitted to continue their existence without suffering any persecution at the hands of the priests. The picture stones of Scandinavians on the Western Islands depict the struggle of Ragnarök with Balder and Loki beneath the Christian cross. In Iceland the ancient myths have always continued to be honored. It is due to the Völuspá, we may venture to say, that Odin and Thor still live, not as gods that are worshiped, but as popular heroes, as the great typical characters that express popular traits.

Yet, in the end, Völuspá was not looked upon merely as a pagan poem with occasional gleams of Christianity. It remained as the most splendid picture of Scandinavian antiquity, viewed from a later age, or rather, from the threshold of a later age. As time advanced, the transition to Christianity was accomplished. It was not a rapid victory; the process extended over the entire Viking Age. In 826 a mission, associated with certain trading centers in Denmark and Sweden, began its activity; the tenth century was the great period of struggle and transition; but the entire eleventh century had to pass before the remoter eastern section of Scandinavia had been

brought into the fold: Bornholm, Blekinge, Gotland, Jómsborg, the great tribe of the Swedes, and the interior mountain regions. The slowness of this process of conversion indicates that there must have been serious pondering before the decisive step was taken.

The conversion of the North was accomplished by voluntary means. Of course, we must not assume that compulsion was never used against any individual; the conditions of the times would forbid any such assumption. But no Scandinavian tribe was forced as a body to assume the new law. What happened was that leading men of the tribe appeared in considerable numbers as its advocates, drawing the stragglers in their wake. Behind the many decisions at the thing meetings in which the acceptance of Christianity was voted, we cannot always assume the presence of a majority, but surely that of a very important minority. And once the choice had been made, it was never rescinded; we do not encounter any pagan reaction of real moment.

There must have been something that attracted the Scandinavians to Christianity. The conversions were not limited to the many persons who came into close contact with Christian communities as merchants or as settlers in the Western Isles. Throughout the North we find men of the mightiest lineage among the first and ablest advocates of the new faith. In Denmark, during the principal epoch of conversion, we find the traveling Bishop Odinkar,

the son of Tóki Jarl, who "converted more men than any other, though he worked no miracles." In Norway, King Olaf Tryggvason appeared shortly after his day as a bold advocate of Christianity. In Gotland and Iceland, we know the names of the wealthy peasants who were its champions. In England, the sees of the great bishoprics were occupied by Scandinavians, hardly one generation after the first great viking baptism. In Iceland, Bishop Isleif led the nation out of the feuds of the saga period to a peaceful and fruitful social life. There must have been something in Christianity which had a powerful effect on some of the best men of the time.

The pagan could understand what was meant when the expounder of Christianity told of the great conflict between friendly and destructive powers, yet not in the sense—as had been believed earlier—that this struggle was to terminate in a Ragnarök, but in the sense that the great struggle had already been fought, and that Christ had burst the iron gates of hell. We find this thought expressed by a pagan skald who fumbles about for images with which to convey the new ideas: "Christ sits in the south by the spring of Urd, the mighty subduer of the Asir of the cliffs" (i.e, the Giants).

Though the picture here vacillates between the pagan spring of Urd and the Christian River Jordan, the whole concept is nevertheless the one that is destined to last for centuries.

The songs of Christ and his victory had the effect of heroic lays greater than any of those hitherto known, and yet familiar because they described the most splendid things known on earth, namely, the king and his retinue. The ruler of heaven and the host of angels guarding his castle was the most tangible picture to express the supremacy of divinity. There was a certain personal appeal in this situation. The idea of service and of a sacrifice of oneself to hold fast to the sworn oath of fealty was not unfamiliar; in their own poetry such devotion had been suffused with all the glamour of an ideal; now this demand was presented as the essential content of life. Among all the Germanic peoples, the foremost thought seems to have been this: Christ is the Mighty God of heaven, with his retinue of apostles while he wanders on earth, and of angels after he has been restored to his heavenly stronghold. Perhaps tnis explains the readiness of men to enter his service.

The service Christ demanded was self-mastery and kindliness to others, and this, too, found an echo in the familiar world. Ethical idealism had been developed more and more by the lays describing the heroic life; and there was in fact no very far-reaching difference between that which was taught by the Christian chieftain and that which Starkad preached: hardening of the body and mastery of the will. In the early days of Scandinavian Christianity we encounter the figure of Asa, a sister of Bishop Odinkar, who

led a life of penance and rigid discipline, and who prophesied to the clergy of Bremen that God would visit judgment upon them for their loose living.

In the olden days, fame among posterity was considered the great "judgment over each of the dead"; this fame magnified or extinguished the life of each, depending on how he had lived, and the same thought recurs more emphatically in the heavenly judge who accepts or rejects each individual. No doubt the thought of a specific form of the human ego that could be dissevered from the world of the body and of the senses, and had its true home in a different world altogether, was quite new; but in the word "soul," which was brought to Scandinavia by Anglo-Saxon and German missionaries, this thought soon obtained an easily comprehensible expression. Furthermore, thoughts as to a punishment in the life beyond were nothing new; it was believed that men who had perjured themselves were destined to become thralls in Valhalla; and we know from the verses of Gisli Sursson how easily the same conception gained admission in a more Christian form.

The most powerful attraction of all, however, was the faith in a mighty god. A legendary report has been handed down, which formulates excellently the contrast between the pagan concept of divinity and that of Christianity. "Hast thou heard," says the aged poetess Steinunn, "that Thor challenged Christ to a duel, and that Christ did not dare to go into combat

with him?" "I have heard," answers the missionary Thangbrand, "that Thor were nothing more than dust and ashes, if God did not will that he lived." The belief in God's omnipotence, the steadfastness with which the adherents of Christ went into battle, full of trust in Him, is stated in all the sources as being the strongest influence that weighted the scales on the Christian side.

Paganism was not equipped to take up the struggle against the new faith. Its one great strength was its having been rooted for thousands of years in the entire life of the individual and of society by custom; but when so many men were transplanted to new soil during the Viking Age, this condition lost its power. On coming into close contact with Christianity, they succumbed to the new faith. A savage viking like Hastings had his sons baptized; chieftains like Guthorm, the first ruler of Danelagh, passed over to Christianity themselves. As a matter of fact, paganism, being a polytheistic religion, was not particularly hostile to foreign religions. Strange gods were permitted to retain their authority and their specific territory. Pagan vikings actually sent a portion of their spoils to Saint Germain near Paris and to Saint Patrick in Ireland, and those who sailed by frequently gave large gifts to the sanctuary at Helgoland, both in the pagan and in the Christian era. There was no objection to recognizing Christ as a powerful foreign god; only if his adherents defiled the pagan sanc-

tuaries was it necessary to proceed against them. When Ansgarius sojourned in Sweden, Christianity was ultimately fixed upon as a tolerated religion after the casting of lots under the open sky had assured the assent of the gods, and after the nation, assembled in the thing, had also voted its consent. A Swedish viking army in Courland ascertained by the same methods that Christ would aid them to victory in their difficult situation; and, after their victory and safe return home, they gave expression to their thanks by instituting a great fast of forty-seven days. There was something in paganism that seemed actually to pave the way for Christianity: its habit of determining in advance what god would be the best helper and then giving him one's complete adherence as one's *fulltrúi*. We learn from many varied sources that Christ was regarded as the best helper in need. The tendency of the people to choose a lord according to their own best judgment aided the spread of Christianity.

Paganism was prevented from completely mobilizing its forces by the fact of its having arisen from so many different roots and possessing a system of ideas based on so many epochs, reaching back even into the remote ages that believed in the magical properties of natural objects. The adoration of many successive generations had imparted to the localities in which the divine service took place a sanctity which was quite independent of the individual god

as a person. This was obvious in Gotland, when Botair of Akubekk built a Christian church. The pagans burned down the first edifice he erected. He then began constructing a second, under the cliff by the shore where the pagans were accustomed to sacrifice to their gods. The people were preparing to burn this structure also, but Botair went into the building himself, and said: "If you burn it down, you shall burn me with it." Thereupon his father-in-law, Likkair the Wise, joined him, and said: "Do not burn down the church. It stands on sacred ground under the cliff by the shore," and the church remained intact. Similarly, many of the churches in Scandinavia were erected on pagan sacrificial sites. The grove or the spring was often preserved into a later age, and the peasant continued to cast his mite into the spring as his forefathers had done before him.

THE Christianity practiced by the Scandinavian peoples after their conversion was in many ways a peculiar product. It bore the impress of the medieval Church, but even more that of the individuals who were its spokesmen. At a time when the infrequent churches were scattered at wide distances over the country, and many a priest could barely translate the Latin text for the mass which he read, the word of experienced men and the song of the skald were the chief means whereby the new mode of thought was disseminated in wider circles.

There were points in the doctrines of the Church that could not seriously enter the minds of these people. For instance, there was the Trinity; strikingly enough, popular usage rechristened every "Trinity Church" as a "Dryhten's Church" (*Drottenskirke*), that is, a church of the Lord. For their own faith permitted them to deal with a *dryhten*, a master. God the Father also disappears almost entirely; these warrior souls did not feel the need of clinging to a Father. The words "God" and "Christ" are synonymous; Christ created the world in days of old; He is the ruler of the heavens. Whenever it was desired to call upon all the power of divinity in its totality, the invocation was: "Help us, Christ and Holy Ghost!" Or, "May God and the Holy Ghost appease you!" The people of this age knew practically nothing of a life of Christ on earth; and the phase of Christ's life which the monastic world could grasp, namely, His suffering, was completely incomprehensible to them; but His divine splendor as contrasted with men was the principal phase of the faith of the times. Poems on the resurrection occupied the chief place among the Christian songs of the skalds.

We hardly ever encounter a more abstract conception, such as might conceive of the godhead primarily as the creative and supervising power, unless we go back to the beginning of the period of conversion. It is told of the lawman Thorkel Mani, a contemporary of the Gisli Sursson who has been mentioned before,

and probably also of the poet of Völuspá, that when dying he had himself borne into the sun and commended his soul to him who had created the sun. Other legendary stories, no doubt of extremely small plausibility, tell of heroes who chose the creator of heaven and earth to be their lord. But once we have passed over the threshold to the introduction of Christianity, we encounter a crude faith in the ruler of the heavens, fashioned after the image of earthly kings, with his citadel and his retinue. "Canute protects the earth as the ruler of Greece (Christ) protects the kingdom of heaven"; or, "it appears to the men, when a Magnus skims over summits of waves in the skis of the sea (i.e., the ship), as if the host of angels of the Ruler of Heaven were dashing over the waves."

This ruler required that his commandments be followed, particularly those that made separation from the daily life of the pagan, such as resting on Sunday and observing the proper times for the great feast days. To us the strict adherence to "Christian usage" may appear somewhat petty, but at the same time the new morality impressed upon people the duty of consideration for the weak. It was strictly forbidden to expose children or to slay the defenseless. Aud, an aristocratic Icelandic woman, built her home straight across the road so that she might entertain all wayfaring folk. The social conscience is strongly expressed in the works of charity in this earliest period;

many persons built bridges over swamps and waterways, "for the sake of their souls," as we read on rune stones. For now man has an ego which it is his duty to develop properly, in a far more serious sense than in the days when posthumous fame was the supreme judge, and when deeds of prowess made life worth while. Gradually we find the contents of the runic inscriptions changing; where formerly the stones bore sagas or eulogies, they now voice prayers to God for the souls of the departed.

This early Christianity wears a bright aspect, very different from the sense of an inescapable fate and the mood of Ragnarök that belonged to paganism. The mighty Christ, His victorious resurrection, His bright kingdom of heaven, are the fundamental notes. Only Hallfred Vandrædaskald speaks in his death hour of his fear of hell, but it must not be forgotten that he was a man with bloody deeds on his conscience, and with a nature as torn and out of joint as that of his admired master Olaf Tryggvason was serene and pious. These early Christians possessed a cheerful but somewhat cool joy in life, together with an ethical-religious fortitude, which involuntarily accepted the medieval idea that the welfare of the commonwealth and the salvation of the individual soul must be attained by essentially the same means.

We should be going too far if we assumed that this epoch was lifted entirely above the foregoing; it must also have contained many destructive forces. The

ancient community based on kindred had been burst asunder by the individualism of the Viking Age—the laments on this subject are loud enough—and furthermore, the change of faith must also have included a moral decline, at least until all human institutions had again attained the solemn protection that once had been afforded by the ancient gods, until the oath again became sacred, and the assembly of the thing was again inviolably holy. The evil crop grew until it culminated in such disastrously destructive periods as the War of the Crown Pretenders in Norway and the feuds of the Sturlungs in Iceland, for which paganism can hardly present a parallel. Nevertheless, this early Christian era, the eleventh and a part of the twelfth century, was a period in which society developed in a peaceful direction, though on the basis of the heritage from the fathers. It produced no powerful or peculiar expression of the new ideas —no ecclesiastical poetry like that of the Anglo-Saxons—but it matured the tendencies that had manifested themselves earlier, since this period became the epoch of laws and sagas.

A single circumstance will suffice to show that the era had attained a certain state of equilibrium. For the first time it selected, among the many ideal characters in the sagas, a typical heroic figure as its culmination. This is Sigurd Fáfnisbani, at the moment he plunges the sword into the dragon's heart. It appears to be inseparable from the monuments

of the early Christian era; it is found on woven textiles in the royal mansion at Trondhjem, in the carvings of the wooden churches of Telemark, or embossed in iron on a West Gothic church portal, or hewn in many rune stones on the Isle of Man, in Gotland, and in Uppland, Södermanland, and Gästrikland on the Swedish mainland. In Sighvat's Óláfsdrápa, refrains from the Sigurd saga had been interpolated until the author recast the drápa and inserted verses on the resurrection of Christ in their place. The poems which most distinctly emphasize the moral greatness of Sigurd belong to the Christian epoch; but the evidence of the many pictorial representations is even stronger, and the repetition of the combat with the dragon occurs everywhere in the viking sagas, the later echoes of the ancient heroic life. Man engaged in bold combat with a monster of superior strength is the ideal of the period, an ideal which recurs as regularly as a natural law, not only in the greater part of Scandinavia, but also in the oldest portion of Christian England, where Beowulf's fight with the devastating dragon developed into the great national epic. However, the tone of the Anglo-Saxon presentation is far graver than the cheerful poetry of the Scandinavians in the transition period.

There are occasional signs that the new ideas were penetrating men's souls. Thus, Gunnvar, a Norwegian woman, erected about the year 1050 a me-

morial stone to "the most capable woman in Hadeland," and had the tablet inscribed with the entire story of the Nativity, in rather crude presentation: the angels and the star over Bethlehem, the three Wise Men from the East, and Mary herself in the stable. There was arising a world of sentiments that were strange to Scandinavian antiquity.

VII. THE ART OF THE SKALDS

THE ancient form of poetry for all the Scandinavian North was one of short, firm lines bound together by heavy alliteration: "*W*ake not to *w*ine, nor to the caressing of *w*omen, *r*ise *r*ather to *H*ildi's (goddess of battle) *h*ard game." From the Eddic songs recorded in Iceland to the memorial verses carved on Danish or Swedish rune stones, it is essentially the same. Furthermore, all of Scandinavia had uniform designations for things connected with the art of poetry: *skald,* a singer; *thul,* a proclaimer of religious or moral doctrines; *vísa,* a short poem; *ærendi,* a strophe; *ord,* a line of verse—evidence of how close-knit Scandinavian civilization was in its beginnings.

This poetry in many ways closely resembled that of the other Germanic races, both in its alliterative form and in the manner in which the life of heroes —and gods—was presented. There is, however, the essential difference that the song among the south-

ern tribes was always accompanied by the notes of the harp; for this reason it swells like a rushing stream; it aspires toward a broader epic presentation, which is fully attained in England with the epic poem *Beowulf* in the eighth century, but is delayed in Germany until the appearance of the medieval rhymed strophes in which the *Nibelungenlied* is composed. The poet of the North knows no tones of the harp as his accompaniment. When he "sings" (Danish *kvæder,* Old Icelandic, *kvedr*), we are to understand practically that he *speaks*—which was the original meaning of the word. His recitation acquires its peculiar color by reason of the brief strophes (four short lines, followed by four more), which require a concise and pregnant expression. In narration, the single telling word is the important thing: in dialogue, we are not given a torrent of speech, but an exchange of short, quick sentences; and in a poem, the characters, who are thus placed in close juxtaposition, have the opportunity of describing each other still more incisively. Thus arises the type of Northern poetry, the short narrative song, whose principal scenes contain an altercation between the acting persons—a type which maintained itself in spite of the changes in its external form throughout the entire Middle Ages, and never developed into long epic narration. It has even distinctly placed its mark on the Scandinavian literature of more recent times.

In the ancient poetry we may observe how the

sense for characterization gains the upper hand, and how the action is condensed. In addition, there also existed a purely speaking poem (*mál*) in a fixed and splendid strophic structure, with shortened final lines. Even in the earliest days, the succession of question and answer seems to have been used as the form in which mythical knowledge, enigmas, and the like could be preserved; the speaking persons were then only an accidental frame for the actual content. But in the Viking Age the individual dialogue poem begins to delineate character; during the encounter of wits, Odin trifles with the Giant's faith in his own superiority, or, having assumed a disguise, he undertakes a trial of strength with the angry Thor. This art expresses itself quite freely and boldly in "Loki's Wrangling" (*Lokasenna*) in the Elder Edda; a short—we may say dramatic—poem, in which the author has his hero reveal all the frailties of the Asir with exuberant humor, until he is obliged to give way to Thor's hammer—a proof, furthermore, of the extent to which the ancient world of myths constituted an esthetic tradition and not a religious system. The dialogue form, furthermore, affords a possibility of imparting more tension to the action than is possible in the ordinary heroic lay; thus, we have Starkad rousing Ingjald to avenge his father's death, Odin assuming the strength of the Asir and permitting the tormentor, who had been warned in vain, to go to his death. These poems indicate a striking

understanding of peculiarities of character as well as an inclination to dramatize life; both tendencies are most prevalent in the Norwegian-Icelandic part of the Scandinavian North, or at any rate best preserved in the Eddic lays.

But there is another poetic product which is far more characteristic of the Norrœnic (i.e., the Norwegian-Icelandic) folk group: it is the form of poetry which we are now accustomed to call skaldic verse in the narrower sense of the term. Externally, it is obviously a special growth; it has rather long stanzas, and the customary alliteration is accompanied by a quite artfully woven scheme of end rhymes. There results a richly ornamented style that jingles like the elaborate silver chains and brooches of the North. As for its content, this form of poetry does not make the character portrayed more living by means of animated retorts, but holds somewhat aloof from its personages, being a narrative poetry which selects its expressions from a stock not common to daily life. One of the principal means of attaining this end is that of poetic circumlocution, the "kenning," as the old skalds put it.

An ancient device of poetry permits one to apply, instead of a word in daily use, some more picturesque and unusual expression, and therefore also to resort to paraphrasing and figurative designations, as for instance to term the sword the "lightning of the bat-

tle," the ship the "sea-mew gliding over the waves," and to count such images, once they have been used, as a special adornment of the poetic style. The skaldic art is characterized by the ruthlessness with which its entire stock of expressions has been removed from daily life and replaced by a style in which things are preferably called by names not their own, and in which above all a certain connection with the world of myths is used to shed a glamour over the entire narration. A poet may not express thanks for the gift of a shield, but must speak of "the leaf under the feet of the Giant Hrungnir," and instead of poison he may say "the drink of the Volsungs," because the Volsung Sinfjötli was slain by poison. This is the origin of the peculiar figurative language of skaldic art. In the mouth of an inspired poet, this language may make the nature of things more vivid; Snorri Sturlason calls swords "serpents thirsting to come forth from the scabbard and gorge themselves with blood"; ships he calls "beasts of the sea that have lain in the boathouse until spring with heads bent low." But as a rule the "kenningar" are quite artificial; every new image trips up the preceding ones, before they have had time to arrive and make themselves clear. The skaldic language therefore displays the same barbarously disintegrated character as the older examples of pictorial art, which wrench apart the limbs of the figures in order the better to fill space; it has lost all relation with actual life.

Those who practice this art do not regard inspiration as the most essential thing. The skaldic art is a handicraft, an accomplishment; the skald boasts of the long period it has taken him to polish his work; "Haustlöng," i.e., "one whole autumn long," is the name of one of the most ancient and famous of these poems. Or, if the skald does stoop to improvise, it is for the purpose of showing how swiftly he can marshall the paraphernalia of his difficult form. Cut off from its connection with reality, the poetic language becomes a play of words. One of the most famous skalds of this era, Eyvind Skaldaspillir, attracted attention by actually reversing the functions of words. In a year of crop failure in his home in northern Norway, it had been necessary for him to sell his arrows to buy herrings, and he tells in a poem how he was obliged to sell "the leaping herrings of the bowstring," i.e., the arrows, in order to purchase "the gliding arrows of the sea," i.e., the herrings. The skaldic art is a type of poetic mathematics in which it is necessary to find the right answer to the problem of addition; there must not be too much nor too little, so that the ensuing image may accord with the taste of the time—otherwise the other skalds will soon call the poor workman to account. All the laws of versification must be observed, not only those referring to single lines and strophes; a proper drápa, which was the most ornate poetic creation, must also have the same number of stanzas in the introduction

as in the conclusion, and the body of the poem must consist of sections presenting a uniform number of verses and a refrain, a *stef,* at the proper point.

The oldest home of the skaldic art is western Norway. In the middle of the ninth century, the oldest known skald, Bragi Boddason, whose works are in many respects those of a beginner, lived in this country. The next stage is that of the host of skalds who gathered about the new kingship of Harald Fairhair. But Harald's conquest was to have important consequences for the home of this art; almost all of the aristocratic families in which it had flourished emigrated to Iceland. The art died out in its homeland. Eyvind Skaldaspillir was there its last shining protagonist; in subsequent times hardly any persons but Icelanders appeared as poets in the Norwegian royal court. In Iceland this dexterity was developed to an incredible point, any desired material being treated in the new traditional style. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, even in the thirteenth, this form of art continues, and the modern poetry of Iceland is not divided from it by any definite boundary, since it still presents distinct earmarks of the skaldic method.

The subjects of the skald's drápa were in the earliest period myths of the gods, which explains why the poetic language was so strongly colored by mythical allusions. After Harald's conquest of Norway, the king's military campaigns became the chief subject, and the myths of the gods—in the Christian era

drápas about Christ and the saints—assume a secondary importance. The essence of this poetry is its dwelling on detail. Therefore the oldest skalds had a fondness for choosing a set of pictures carved in wood as subjects for their lays; with a theme thus limited, the poet was enabled to develop freely all the repetitions and variations which his linguistic ingenuity afforded. A king's drápa was a particularly fine subject for the skald, because it could render in its descriptions a great number of factual details which in the ordinary heroic style would have had to be omitted. The drápa became a rhymed chronicle in gorgeous style, of great value to future centuries as an historical source. This tendency to describe and dwell on details presented possibilities for future development; from it the lyric poetry in Iceland was born.

We cannot doubt that these remote ages also knew poetic outbursts as spontaneous as that of a maiden in Sætersdal in our day who expresses her grief or her longing, or as that of two modern youths who belabor each other in verse after the fashion called *stefjast,* i.e., to sing alternately, in the old language—in fact, the term survives to-day. But the rich development of the form also gave lyric talent an opportunity to show itself. The great drápas were followed by a host of individual strophes in the same artistic form of verse, expressive of mockery, defiance, jubilation, longing. The Icelandic national char-

acter includes a peculiar sarcastic strain, which some would assign to the admixture of Irish blood, others to the native mood of the West Norwegian population. Many of the great drápa poets were inclined to write derisive poems (*níd*) or love verses (*mansöngr*). Only one of them is able to express his whole soul in a poem with lyric coloring; this is Egil Skallagrimsson.

No other Icelander had so rich a poetic gift as Egil. Of course, he belonged to Iceland in the days when a specific Icelandic national character had not been developed. His father, Skallagrim, was a landtaker from one of the West Norwegian mountain regions, from the fjords. Here Skallagrim and his old father Kveldulf lived as *hersar,* i.e., "peasant chieftains," until they were involved in a feud with King Harald himself, who had Skallagrim's brother Thorolf killed. They wreaked blood revenge on relatives of the king and then went into banishment. Egil himself developed a peculiar combination of incompatible qualities, a sort of Starkad in his mingling of good and evil, or rather of noble and base; but he also combined other opposites. He was the viking type of his day, in his size, strength, venturesomeness, and presence of mind; on the other hand, he had in pronounced degree the qualities of the West Norwegian brachycephalic, not only the poetic gift, but also the mental limitation with regard to all wider social interests, suspiciousness, avarice, and the

curious weakness of permitting himself to be completely overwhelmed at certain moments by difficulties and misfortunes. His appearance also—according to his own account—had much that is common to this racial type: dark hair, black eyes, heavy set head, ugly face. The later sagas have, quite justifiably, described his appearance in the same style but even more emphatically, as contrasted with his blond and trusting brother Thorulf.

Defiant opposition to the superior strength of the royal dynasty—this was the task for which Egil was destined by his origin and the events of his youthful career; but the first experience that moved him deeply took place in viking trips to the West, namely, the slaying of his brother Thorolf. Both fought mightily in the battle of Brunanburh in 936, and —characteristically—on the English side, against their own countrymen. Thorolf was killed. For a long time Egil felt himself crippled by sorrow, cut off from men, forced back upon himself: "Bold Thorolf fell, the slayer of the Jarl, who fearless went into the mighty tumult of Odin; green grows the earth anew on Vina strand over my lordly brother, but I—this is the torment of death—must hide my grief." Even stranger was the next experience: King Athelstan steps before his grieving warrior and slips a ring upon his arm as a compensation for the loss; the gold at once awakens the warrior's joy of life: "The downward depending cliffs of the eyebrows

hung heavily; there found I him that can smooth the deep furrows of the brow; a king with his gold band swept away the depending cliffs; the gloom departed from my glance." Egil is once more a viking. He continues to wander through the world fighting, and sings of his deeds in single verses arising either from the present moment or from memories of his earlier experiences. The subjects are his deeds in battle, or, more frequently, his indomitable courage in the hour of danger. He reverts to no other incident so frequently as to that in which he entered the hall of his mortal enemy, King Eirik Blood-Axe, in order to purchase his life with a poem. His eulogy of the king, the famous "Head Ransom" (*Höfudlausn*), which is composed in a new sonorous verse form borrowed from the Anglo-Saxons, is a virtuoso piece full of the splendid clash of arms, but it by no means serves to express the poet's own thoughts; and its conclusion, "From the citadel of laughter I brought forth the song," sounds like a derisive laugh at the expense of a prince before whom he could not, after all, humiliate himself. But we know the real incident from individual verses and from the memorial poem on his friend Arinbiörn, who was his supporter when "the serpent-sharp glance of the ruler shot uncanny rays," and he purchased through his song "the not very beautiful poet's reward," namely, his own angular wolf-gray head. We are not fully informed as to how Egil came into Eirik's power, but it would

be quite in accordance with his character if he had courted this danger in order to carry out some venture of hitherto unparalleled audacity. An experience that made an even profounder impression on him was the subsequent loss of his young son, who was almost a man. And as a memorial to him he wrote "The Loss of a Son" (*Sonatorrek*). This poem does not tell about the youth drowned in a storm; it contains practically nothing but the inner experiences of the poet himself: the frightful crippling effect of his grief, the memory it revives of every earlier bereavement, the mighty outburst of vengeful spite against the grim god of the sea, interrupted by a feeling of his own impotence. He regards his own countrymen with suspicion, since he has now been parted from the few who really were close to him, and he concludes his reckoning with Odin, who has broken friendship with him—and yet Odin had given him a compensation for suffering: the splendid art of the skald, and also the hard nature which enabled him to make open foes of secretly intriguing adversaries. He is ready to face Hel without sadness and with a willing mind, where she waits for him out on the promontory, at the burial mound of his ancestors.

The mighty waves that surged through Egil's soul —jubilation in danger, and heartrending grief—indicate a turning point in the life of the Scandinavian people. For the first time lyric feeling broke forth in full force; the world-historic point had been

reached, where an inner experience counted for more than an external deed. The defiant gamble of the viking, the warrior, with life is here expressed in an entirely new way. Even fuller expression is given to the ancient self-confidence of the peasant who vigorously opposes the royal power; the individual verses speak with pride of having "wreaked the vengeance of the hersi on the ruler." The relation of the peasant to the community is expressed in its most noteworthy form precisely because Egil hates the larger social structure and feels himself bound only —and therefore the more closely—to his nearest of kin and to a single friend. In these ancient forms of life his nature has its roots; but the new element is the strength of feeling which forces him to sing of his inner experience; new also is the peculiarity of his inner nature, the depressing and crippling weariness alternating with a consciousness of the power of his own soul. The outburst of individuality in this epoch now makes itself felt in poetry.

Egil is the master, but he does not stand alone. One of his contemporaries is Kormak, the singer of love. Egil is like cold forged iron; Kormak is like iron in the fire, from the very moment when he first sees the woman whom he thenceforth in vain seeks to make his own: "The cliffs will float like corn on the waters, the great rocks will stride out into the depths of the sea, before again so fair a maid as Steingerd is born." But these men of powerful feel-

ing can hardly be said to have founded a school. The transition to Christianity was incapable of releasing torrents of lyricism; on the other hand, a reportorial drápa style, even more perfected in form than that of the older skalds, assumed fixed forms.

The single exception is Sighvat, the most sympathetic of the skalds of Saint Olaf, a type of the vigorous blossoming of civilization in which the Viking era later terminated. His first poems came into being as he sat in the evening by the side of a fisher-maid and gazed down on the fisher village while the smoke rose silently from the huts. All his poetry is characterized by a peculiar talent for perpetuating ephemeral impressions of travel; whether he is describing the women of a trading port who are lured from their houses by the rattle of hoofs, or whether he is sending a melancholy thought to his king from his seat on the mountain top. Though an Icelander by birth, he is at home in all the lands inhabited and traveled by Scandinavians; he is fond of larding his speech with Norman words, and makes himself the advocate of the Norwegian people, opposing the arbitrary acts of young King Magnus in his "Free Words" (*Bersöglisvísur*). But though the words glided smoothly from Sighvat's tongue, they found no other mouth to sing them.

His contemporary and rival Thormod Kolbrunarskald, who composed a drápa on the death of his foster-brother, in a petrified circumlocutionary style,

and who fell with Saint Olaf at Stiklestad, where he recited his last strophes when the arrow was already in his body, was, in the main, a better type of the skaldic art. As a whole, this art was incapable of expressing a new civilization; it remained fettered to the life of kings and vikings in Scandinavian antiquity, and in some measure was connected with this life chiefly in its most barbarous form.

VIII. VIKING AND ROMANTIC SAGAS

THE great literary creation of the early Middle Ages was not any form of poetry, but the *saga*. The word "saga" means a connected narrative, and it embraced at first all types of oral relation, from a truthful account down to a pure fairy tale. When we use the word "saga" now, however, we think particularly of the detailed historical accounts which are the most remarkable product of Iceland. We think of a finished written composition, but we must also give some attention to the oral development that preceded it.

A saga, that is, an historical or legendary oral tale, has existed in all periods of history, but the Viking Age brought such tales to the fore. The abundance of adventures in remote regions and under unusual circumstances afforded an extensive material for story-telling among contemporaries, and this material could not be contained in the usual literary form. It had to be told with all the fresh newness of a tale

of travel, a quality that characterized it from the outset. That is why the heroes of the Viking Age did not pass into epic poetry, but were dealt with in connected but free narrative.

The typical example is Ragnar Lodbrok, who was a viking chieftain of the Danish royal line. Accompanied by his sons, he pushed his harrying expeditions to remote regions of southern Europe; he is mentioned in 845 as a leader of the Norman army on the Seine, and appears to have been slain on the coast of Scotland in 866. His deeds of prowess were the last and most significant in the first part of the Viking Age, which was rich in distant journeys.

When the Danish army under his sons settled down in Northumberland, these campaigns appeared in a remote fantastic light; ancient legendary traits were then attached to the hero: he becomes a new Sigurd Fáfnisbani, who slays the dragon and gains the latter's treasures and a bride besides; he dies—like Gunnar—singing in the snake pit. The Ragnarssaga, with its various conflicts and love adventures, is the most complete viking saga that has survived the changes of time. We have it in two different forms: the one, more historical, form is Norwegian, and consists chiefly in the recital of a great number of deeds; the other, more poetic, is Icelandic. In Aslaug, Ragnar's wife, this saga presents the most charming feminine figure of the Viking Age, one full of modesty, pride,

and wisdom, and of a curiously delicate and restrained tenderness.

What is true of a great heroic figure such as Ragnar is also true of the smaller ones: when the viking host after its many travels subsided in the settlement of conquered regions, and when its horizon contracted, the deeds of its heroic age loomed as legends. In the eleventh century, Sivard the Fat became a romantic saga hero. He was a warrior who had made his way under Canute the Great by main strength and violence; a bold act of homicide placed him on the jarl's seat of Northumberland, and after countless combats and victories he died of a sudden disease. While dying, he had himself arrayed in his helmet, shield, and byrnie and his battle-axe placed in his hand, "in order to die like a man and not lying down like a cow." The legend added information concerning the hero's descent from a wild bear in the forest, dragon-battles on his first viking campaign, and an encounter with Odin, who presented him with a raven-flag prophetic of victory.

Other figures passed into the fairy tale world even more completely. The Saga of King Hadding embodied a number of viking legends concerning the deeds of Hastings, but they first consolidated themselves into a religious problem-poem on the conflict between the worship of the Asir and the friendship with Giants. Örvar-Odd, or Odd the Far-traveled, became an embodiment of the far-traveled viking in

the north, the east, and the south, in defiant struggle against the fate that had been predicted for him. In the extreme north of Norway, in Helgeland, a special legend cycle of adventurous journeys among the Lapps and conflicts with Giants was invented; Örvar-Odd was loosely connected with this family.

These personages and many others of the same stamp dominate the west part of the Northern world throughout the Middle Ages, retaining their hold on the common people even longer, from the extreme boundaries of Norway to the Orkney Islands and Dublin. They constituted the fundamental stock in the folk-songs of the Faroe Islands and Telemark in Norway down into the nineteenth century, occasionally appearing even in Denmark and Sweden: in Saxo's Chronicle, in the most imaginative of our warrior songs, and in later literature, even accompanying Charles XII and his men on their campaign. In Iceland, the viking and romantic saga proceeded side by side with the form of saga native to that country, and when the latter disappeared the romantic saga was still vigorous enough to hold sole dominance.

In the most historical of these sagas, the motives are still very similar to those of the ancient heroic legends, but without the fundamental tragic note. These individuals, who roam freely about, do not become actors in real family tragedies; relationships of foster-brotherhood and love affairs come and go without leaving serious traces behind. In the course of time,

the legends also create their own set of ideas. The liberation of a maiden from the Giants or from a wicked wooer is a favorite subject—rather perhaps because of an incipient chivalrous inclination than because of literary influences from abroad. On the other hand, the tone becomes ruder. The hero resembles the crude swordsman of the ancient lays more than a chivalrous hero. He is preferably depicted as a sturdy peasant lad defying his ruler: "I will not have it so; such is not my mood," speaks Ramund the Young in a song based on one of the viking sagas. The burlesque traits of the romantic saga even enhance this crude effect. But just this somewhat coarse and peasant-like form of the ancient heroic figure was for centuries capable of expressing the ideals of the people.

It is noteworthy how much foreign material these legendary sagas could absorb without relinquishing their own character. They show the art of the Irish, permitting the narration to culminate in a lyric outburst, but the thought in them remains Scandinavian: Ragnar sings his own death song in the snake-pit—the greatest and boldest example of the traditional motive of contempt for death. Much was learned from the foreign art of narration, which is resplendent with light, color, and curious shapes; the flock of swans with the mystic ribbon leads the hero by night to the place of his deed, but the scene as a whole strikes us as a Norwegian mountain legend and

by no means Irish. Thus the saga also absorbed the fairy tale; the story of the boy and the wild man became the story of King Harald and the Giant on Dovrefell, and heroes of all kinds assumed the external shape of the strong and sleepy Askelad. A new supply of materials flowed in from the British Isles later in the Middle Ages, such as transformation charms wrought by a stepmother, and the lifting of charms; but the viking saga was capable of absorbing and fusing all this. An instance is the viking Illugi who has come to a Giant's cave; he lies by night in the arms of the fair daughter of the Giant, but suddenly the terrible Giantess stands over him with raised sword, yet he fears her not, and then her power as a Giantess is broken, the entire family is redeemed, and its members regain human form. Manly courage in the threatening hour of death has once more carried off the victory. Later came the chivalrous romance literature of the South, which reached the North in book form and through the mediation of the Norwegian royal court; the chivalrous feasts, tournaments, and intrigues may here and there leave traces in the viking saga, but can neither transform nor displace it; it is too firmly rooted in the great masses of the people for that. There is a single viking saga which contains a mixture of southern and native features, the saga describing the love of Frithjof and Ingeborg. This is not an ancient saga material; the story was invented in the twelfth or

thirteenth century by a man of Icelandic training. No doubt there is something of the chivalrous romance in its fundamental motive of the long parted and finally reunited lovers; but it differs from its foreign patterns by a certain element of chastity; the life and background are entirely those of the Viking Age, though a little faded and as feeble as a remote echo. A modern poet took up this story and put into it what it lacked in color and emotion; in this chivalrous form—Tegnér's *Frithjof's Saga*—this legendary saga became a part of the poetic canon of the modern age.

IX. ICELAND AND ITS SAGAS

THE Icelandic saga is the second great expression of the new art of narration; it was more strictly limited in space and time, but from the artistic—occasionally also from the scholarly—point of view, it attained a height that has rarely been reached by the human mind.

Among the peculiarly favorable conditions for mental development in Iceland, the most important was the selection of the human stock that settled the island. It included all those families of petty kings and peasant chieftains from western Norway who refused to yield to the autocratic rule of Harald Fairhair, preferring to seek a new home on the distant island which had recently been discovered. At the same time it was impossible for the society of Iceland to become a mere repetition of the old Norwegian community; the racial mixture was too pronounced for that. There came Norwegians from various parts of the country, stragglers from Sweden, vikings from

the West, including even some semi-Celtic elements. While the largest part of the population came from the districts of Hordaland and Rogaland, in western Norway, it was these regions that had contributed most to the great Viking Age and the period of discoveries; many families had spent years in the western colonies. They had acquired a wide horizon and an insight into political conditions in near and distant places, for all these scattered habitations were closely connected with each other by family ties and common enterprises. The numerous merchant ships constantly brought news, which was received, scrutinized, and judged. The experiences of contemporaries naturally became transformed into sagas.

These aristocratic and talented persons settled in Iceland under more severe conditions of life than they had formerly known. Instead of being a petty king, the peasant had at most a very limited chieftain authority as the *godi* (sacrificial priest and thing leader) of his district; many a man of noble origin had to settle as a peasant in the *godord* (*godi* district) of another man. Instead of proud raftered halls, they built houses with walls of earth several yards thick, a continuous row or group of such houses constituting the farm buildings. Cattle-breeding, bird-hunting, fishing required an extreme degree of attention, if they were to yield foodstuffs for all the housecarls and servants; a man who once had traded in the most precious commodities of foreign countries had now

only the home-woven frieze to export. The external circumstances of life were narrowing down. The only earmark of nobility that was still retained from the forefathers was the mental culture, the ability to pass in review a succession of events, to form a judicious estimate of situations.

Like the viking saga, the Icelandic saga also grew out of reports of contemporary happenings. A man

An Icelandic Farm in the Middle Ages, in the Background the Dwelling, in the Foreground the Outhouses

who had recently returned home would sit at the Althing and tell his story—a connected account—of all that had taken place during the year at well-known scenes of action.

Or we may encounter such a scene as the following: the skald Thormod lies in one of the booths at the thing, taking his afternoon nap. A man enters and says: "Why liest thou here? Thou art missing a

splendid entertainment."—"What is it and where dost thou come from?"—"I was at Thorgrim Einarsson's booth," says the newcomer, "and almost all the thing-people are there."—"What are they talking about?"—"Thorgrim is telling a saga. I know not whom it concerns; but he tells pleasingly. A chair is placed for him outside the booth, and the men sit around him and listen."—"Canst thou not tell me one whom he names in the saga?"—"There is a warrior Thorgeir in the saga, and Thorgrim himself, methinks, also appears in the tale; but go thither and listen to it!" "That can be done," says Thormod. He has realized that Thorgrim Einarsson's tale is of the homicide he has committed against Thormod's own foster-brother, and he takes his battle-axe with him and turns the dark side of his cloak out before he goes to join the crowd. A sudden shower of rain interrupts the narration and forces all to rush to the booths; during the confusion Thormod splits Thorgrim's skull with his axe and uses a clever ruse to turn suspicion for the deed away from himself.

Probably many a saga originated in this way. The story was related to an attentively listening circle of hearers by one who had himself taken part in the events; and while the first scene is being thus reported, life itself continues the destinies of the acting persons. The materials of the narratives of the Icelanders were drawn from Norway, the Faroe Islands, the Orkney Islands, Greenland, sometimes Dublin

also; they even included Denmark and Sweden and, in one case, the Northmen in Russia. The Icelandic saga was always strictly concerned with men of Scandinavian or rather Norwegian race in the widest sense of the word. But it treated particularly events in Iceland itself, with the keen eye of the artist and the sobriety of the scholar.

Iceland has its saga age, the age in which "the sagas were made," as the saga language itself states, i.e., when the events described took place. This is the period from 930, the end of the settlement age, to 1030, the conclusion of the first generation after the introduction of Christianity, which took place in 1000 A.D. In all this period, there were ceaseless collisions between arrogant peasants, who were curbed only by a new and weak legal order. But when the constitution was more definitely consolidated and regular habits of work had become fixed, when the leading clerics made greater efforts to limit feuds, the unrest abated. And only then did the sagas in the proper sense of the term begin to take shape. Now that the present moment was less eventful and exciting, attention was fixed on the deeds of the past; they were again brought forth and shaped artistically into connected accounts.

What then took form did not differ as yet from anything that might have been done with the life of Ragnar or other vikings, or with Hrólf and Attila in the period of the Migration of Nations.

Only on one point was there an essential difference. The horizon was not closed around these nearer figures as it had been in the case of Hrólf and Ragnar, whose lives were thus transmuted into more general poetic or imaginative accounts. Men in Iceland lived and moved in the same region in which their fathers had lived; they knew every spot where conflicts had taken place or where a deserted farmyard gave evidence of settlement; their descendants were on the spot as listeners or narrators; they were acquainted not only with the principal personages, but also with a great number of the subsidiary personages in the tale, and in many cases they knew, from other sagas, the background and significance of the historical setting. It is only when the saga moves in regions outside of Iceland, particularly if it seeks very remote shores, such as Sweden, Finmark, or Bjarmaland, that it shows an inclination to resolve itself into the same fantastic images as the viking sagas. But on Icelandic soil the horizon is not closed; the narrator feels himself to be in direct contact with his material; thus the latter retains the objectivity and rich variety of actual life.

It is difficult now to ascertain how much in the presentation of the sagas is actually historical and how much is the result of artistic elaboration. We possess an historical yardstick only in the case of events outside of Iceland; but it would be improper to apply the same yardstick to Iceland, for there the

narrative is of an entirely different character. Nor is it essential to determine the precise percentage of historic fact in the sagas; the mental aspiration and ability which is evidenced in them is enough: the ability to represent events—incidents that often are petty and insignificant in themselves, such as disputes over a stranded whale or an uncertain boundary post—as expressions of the nature and mode of action of the persons, and to show how the entire chain of great and petty actions helps to decide destinies.

The saga contains a wealth of details in each transaction; it describes each thrust that is dealt in combat, each move on the legal and political chessboard, external peculiarities in the actions of an individual, weapons, garments, stature, facial expression. Above all, its ability to depict character is remarkable; each character expresses itself in its typical great and petty acts, remains always uniform, and is contrasted with other persons of the same saga.

The narrators of the sagas were persons of the same station as those who are described,—in other words, wealthy Icelandic peasants; in not a few instances, the art of the narrator was combined with that of the skald. Less frequently, Icelanders of lower station earned a livelihood by appearing as saga tellers at the royal Norwegian court. In the twelfth century, priests had a certain connection with the oral narration, and perhaps even more with the recording of the saga, since their place in any mental activity

was quite prominent. But these persons possessed a native culture in a far higher sense than did the overwhelming majority of clerics in the rest of Europe.

The period in which the sagas were committed to writing was about 1150-1250. Concerning the actual origin of these manuscripts we know nothing. The authors indicated neither their names nor their literary activities in other connections; no date or literary turn of phrase will give a clew to the manner in which these works came into being. We cannot even determine whether they were first intended to be read aloud or were merely texts to be memorized by the saga teller before his recitation; for the mode of presentation was always that of an oral recital.

Of course, this elaboration in written form permitted a finish, a checking up of details, a careful choice of expression, which far exceeded the possibilities of oral transmission. But we cannot ascertain the extent of the changes wrought in this transition, any more than we can know to what extent the various portions of the material were only fitted together in order to constitute units of action. Investigators have sought to supplement our definite knowledge by a number of conjectures; one student will say that the life-story of each individual person was a single whole at a very early date; another tells us that it was only the saga writer who fitted the many individual incidents into a rounded plan. It is prob-

able, however, that the recorded form of the saga had best be considered as a combination of all the elements and tendencies that had taken shape in a number of oral traditions.

Let us choose an example for purposes of illustration. We shall take the example that offers the best opportunities for historical control, the Saga of Egil Skallagrimsson. There was available, to start with, the poetic tradition, the poems in which Egil expressed his hatred and grief, his misanthropy, his suspiciousness, his defiance, his exuberant youth, and his tottering old age, which afford a complete picture of the man, even to his external appearance, his dark and wrinkled head—all this was available for any one's use, if only an author would come who could fuse all these personal traits into a proper union with Egil's experiences. Furthermore, there was the saga proper of the line of Skallagrim, the conflict with the mighty royal house of Norway: first, the splendid first act, in which Skallagrim's brother Thorolf falls through the intrigues of traducers, and his father Kveldulf, together with Skallagrim, wreaks vengeance; then follows the rest of the drama, including Egil's falling out with Eirik Blood-Axe, from the petty bickering before the king's bailiff, to the great scene in which the king's men break the peace of the thing, and the other great scene in which Egil erects the shame-pole and pronounces the magic words that drive Eirik forth from his kingdom;

finally, there is the tremendous scene in which Egil stands unbowed in the royal hall, though his life is at stake. The narration had to start with Egil's own account, and was throughout a eulogy of Egil as an ideal peasant chieftain, who, independent and ingenious, was never obliged to submit to the royal power. However, the picture of its own members, which the house of Skallagrim handed down, was not an individual picture; it is entirely typical of the great peasant and viking of the time. The skaldic anecdotes that were transmitted to posterity, little stories that are connected with Egil's individual poems, sometimes also with other conditions of his life, contain traits that are much more personal. These products are the output of the younger generation, which looked back with admiration, but also with a certain amount of skepticism, on the mighty evidences of his spiritual torments which Egil offered. Among these were his boundless grief over his son's death, when his daughter had to deceive him in order to prevent him from starving himself to death; and the story of his riding after the young skald to punish him for his gift, to slay him because the gift included a demand that Egil compose a poem. But round about among the common people the popular tradition exalted the prestige of this great family and pictured it with even more fantastic features. When the harvester stood before the smithy and sharpened his scythe against the white stone block by the door,

he probably thought of Skallagrim rowing out alone in his boat and diving down to find this very block, how he lifted it up from the depths and rowed it back to Borg; or, when he was out of doors in the evening, he would see in his mind's eye a light burning on the spot where old Egil in his avarice had buried his treasure; or he would recall the legend of old Kveldulf, whose longing to come to Iceland was so great, that he commanded, as he was dying, that his coffin be thrown overboard, so that it might touch land, and how it *had* reached the shore, and had indicated a parcel of land for his posterity, and how his gravemound rose on a promontory by the water. Furthermore, there were all the later accretions of saga material which were added in order that Egil should be provided with a career which would correspond with that of the other heroes of the Viking Age. He arrived on a little island in Norway, issued victorious from a duel with Ljot the Pale—a very common name for a base rascal—and thus liberated the sister of a young peasant from a forced marriage. "I lay no claim to reward therefor," he pronounced in the fairest chivalrous style; "the tumult of swords (the combat) with the pale man was a merry feast for me,"—which is quite a contrast to the avarice and meanness which the anecdotes, sometimes even the lays, do not hesitate to ascribe to Egil in vigorous lines. He shows similar generosity in other traveling adventures. Finally, we behold him as a

leader of the army in the service of the English king, and in this action he wins a great battle over the Scottish king. Of course all this is quite unhistorical, but it is a romance which the saga teller—or the saga tellers—invented in order to provide an explanation for Egil's youthful verses written about the time of Thorolf's death.

It would seem to be a difficult task to fuse all these Egils into one: the idealized wealthy peasant, the chivalrous hero, the queer old man of the anecdotes, the giant warrior of the popular legends; yet this task was successfully carried out. The saga writer very ably read Egil's personality from the scattered single strophes, and thus outlined the character that constitutes a common denominator for the many scenes. He took no pains to eliminate the traits of avarice and treachery assigned to Egil in the anecdotes; in fact, he permitted precisely these phases of Egil's character to make themselves evident at appropriate moments; and he subdued the magnanimity of the foreign adventures to such an extent that no striking discord remained. Even the popular story that lurked about in dark places became a goldmine of poetic motives: the family's descent from the Giants appeared in the most ancient days as ability to cast spells; later, in Kveldulf and his son, as berserker rages, and, finally, it was minimized to human proportions in Egil, with his strength, hardness, and ugliness—like a hidden subsoil out of which the pe-

culiar nature of the family and the saga are seen to grow. The author has the gift of endowing every least detail with powers of characterization. From a few of the nicknames of ancient land-takers, he creates the powerful scene in which Skallagrim appears for the first time, to ask compensation for the death of his brother. What a giant defiance he and his retinue opposed to the king! What a rare poetic gift, to enrich the whole by means of each individual detail!

We are perhaps going too far in assuming a *single* author. Perhaps this saga is the work of several men, each one profiting by the labors of his predecessor. We are not aware of the personal share of any individual; we observe only a coming together of all the faculties of the race, a happy combination in which comprehension of the human soul, fullness of material, sense of reality and instinctive foreboding, all unite to create a masterpiece.

The Icelandic saga is a new art, arising from an intimate connection between the author and his material, combining the traditions of the past, which the sagaman may be said to have sucked with his mother's milk, with the life of his contemporaries, which afforded the human material and scenic background utilized by him in rich measure. But the saga is also—and this is not so obvious at first—the outcome of literary culture. The sagaman's capacity of sounding men's souls is particularly closely con-

nected with the later of the Eddic lays. One single saga, the Laxdælasaga, has a woman for its hero; Gudrun, daughter of Osvif, with her tremendous passion, who, placed between the love of two men, "dealt worse by him whom she most loved"—is derived from the Brynhild of the heroic poetry. At times we are in a position to point out literary prototypes for individual scenes. When Egil is present at his son's interment and his powerful inner emotion bursts his cloak, this incident is a repetition—in somewhat more reasonable circumstances—of the scene in which Sigurd sets forth after his last interview with Brynhild. Or when Egil, after Thorolf's death, is seated in the hall of the English king, indifferent to all that goes on about him, and filled only with the heavy grief of his soul, and when now his left eyebrow rises beyond his forehead while his right eyebrow drops mightily, after which the two eyes engage in the reverse operation—this is surely but an echo of Cuchullin's rage in the Irish heroic poetry, the incident having been sifted through a number of intermediate versions. The neat characterization and the technique of the saga art are shown in the ease with which it constructs its bridges from reality into fantastic incidents.

The center of gravity in the Egilssaga is the powerful character of the hero in its manifold forms of expression. The previous history of his race is felt to be an introduction to his own career. The collision

with the kings of Norway, which entirely fills the action at the beginning, ultimately comes to its conclusion, while our personal interest in the hero increases. After having passed through all these incidents, and witnessed finally the tragic juxtaposition of mighty strength and frailty in his old age, we feel ourselves completely captivated by this giant spirit, whose impressive but curious and lonely path through life has been the subject of our astonished contemplation.

The Icelandic saga usually deals with the career of one person only; it often turns out that the previous history of the family and the more loosely connected episodes have a certain relation with the principal figure. We also find sagas in which the grouping about a central point is but faintly indicated, and the general character is rather that of memoirs; events in a certain era, within a certain district, and about a certain group of persons are described. This is the case with the great tale of the Eyrbyggjar, the Eyrbyggjasaga, in which the political wisdom of the godi Snorri barely holds our interest; or the Njálssaga, which actually consists of two related sagas, one terminating with Gunnar's brave defense and downfall, the other with the burning of Njál and his sons.

There are shorter sagas, in which the action constitutes a perfectly rounded outline. Thus, the saga of Gunnlaug Snake-Tongue deals altogether with the struggle between the two wooers for Helga the Fair,

a struggle which begins with her father's dream of the swan on the gable of his house and the combat of the two eagles to win the swan, and leads to the scene when Helga, dying, spreads out the cloak that Gunnlaug has given her and gazes upon it, until her heart breaks and she sinks down, lifeless, in her husband's arms. As works of fiction, these finished compositions lie closer to our understanding, but as contributions to the history of the human spirit, or at least as examples of the summits to which that spirit has attained, the longer sagas rank higher by reason of the profundity of their character study and their versatile understanding of the play of forces which determine the course of destiny.

The moral point of view of the saga is difficult to fix, if only for the reason that it is a part of the narrator's art to betray no special sympathy for one character more than another. The saga does not consciously assume any other point of view than that of an attempt to describe life; it does not aim to mold life. Its sympathy is on the side of every strong manifestation of human powers in passion, wisdom, physical strength, prowess of arms. And yet, the saga appears to hold within it a more ethical appreciation, a feeling that Egil's misfortune may have some connection with the harshness and cruelty of his own character, while such a man as Gunnar of Hlidarendi, the most spotless figure in the sagas, passes through life with more freedom and poise and dies the death

of a hero. As for their religion, the sagas are based neither on paganism nor on Christianity, but on a faith in the inevitable stride of destiny, evidencing itself to men through omens, visions, and dreams. The saga teller does not formally believe in the supernatural; he will not vouch for it personally, but circumvents it with a "they say so," or "it is told." But the course of destiny and the omens have an internal connection with the course of the action; just because it is half concealed, the supernatural has an all the more impressive function in the prognostication scenes and ghost scenes of the saga. In its faith in destiny, without any specifically religious coloring, the Icelandic saga closely resembles the heroic lay; the mystic connection between the supernatural and human life is, on the other hand, something new.

There is an ancient folk heritage in this lurking supernatural world, a heritage that may, for the most part, consist in superstition and a fear of ghosts as felt by the people of the Norwegian west coast, with some admixture of Celtic belief in spirits. For a while this popular heritage is kept in the background by the sobriety of the viking spirit. In the case of the Egilssaga, we have seen how this superstitious element develops through the stage of poetry into the art of narration, passing from the tales of shepherds and harvesters into the festive hall where the sagaman recites before a company of distinguished hearers; it is in this very form that it has a powerful influence

on the artistic shaping of the material. This undercurrent of premonitions, darting into the light at intervals, fuses the individual portions that live in the memory into a poetic whole, and permits the narrative to play on the whole gamut of life.

Unfortunately, this happy union of opposite tendencies in the general mental life lasts but a short time. A mysterious fantasy, pregnant with disaster, comes into being, and carries off the victory over the ancient worldly wisdom and the poet's sense of proportion. In the bitter years of the Sturlung conflicts, about the middle of the thirteenth century, the fear in people's souls expresses itself constantly in visions and dreams. Elements that had once been subject to poetic domination now gradually gain the upper hand. The downfall of the Icelandic free state brings about also a cessation of the national saga literature. Preference is shown for the romantic saga, to which the cultivated esthetic sense is now turned; its fantastic elements become stronger and stronger, and digress farther and farther from reality. The nation that once had so sharp an eye for the world of reality falls into slumber—politically, esthetically, economically—and sleeps its sleep of centuries, full of disturbing dreams, while the elves shriek their shrill laughter from all the cliffs and the Giants from all the rocky caves, while the earth quakes, and the fire-mountains shine, and souls fly about the crater of Hekla like black birds.

x. ICELANDIC SCHOLARS

ICELAND became a home also of scholars. Their intellectual production was characterized not only by artistic form, but by a continued effort to grasp the nature of things, a sober, serious criticism combined with a gift of fine observation and the ability to draw conclusions from given terms. History, mythology, linguistics, and jurisprudence here attained a level that knows no parallel elsewhere in the Middle Ages.

In Iceland there were learned men (*fródir menn*), who were fully informed about the traditions of the olden times, including family relationships and happenings, as well as the poetic material of the past. Yet this knowledge alone would not have been enough to distinguish the Icelanders from many other nations. That which sets them apart is their spirit of doubt and investigation. They expressed uncertainty when they encountered various reports of the same incident; they aspired to fix the norms that would result

in truth. We may observe, first of all, the definiteness with which they chose, from a number of available reports, that version which would best correspond to everyday human conditions, and if this version existed only in a fantastic presentation, they sought to find the more plausible event that might lie concealed within it. Reasonableness became a chief law of historical investigation, but it was applied with caution; where it was not easy to dispose of a curious report, the report was handed over to the reader's own judgment with expressions of the writer's skepticism. At the same time—and this is still more remarkable—rules were created for a criticism of sources. The fundamental principle of modern historical writing, namely, that contemporary reports as to any event are infinitely more valuable than its reflections in later ages, was already accepted in its essential outlines by the Icelanders. A man familiar with history did not content himself with the narration as commonly told in the days when men, as guests in a house, "passed their time in telling sagas"; he would ask each of the old people who had stood close to the events, would inquire from whom each one had received his knowledge, whether it was perhaps from an old man conversant with history, in the narrator's youth; or he would trace his way back to the contemporary skaldic lays which were composed on the subject of the persons concerned, and were recited in

the presence of many who had themselves been eye-witnesses of the events.

Ári Fródi (Ári the Wise), who died in 1148, was Iceland's first author and the founder of its critical historical writings. What *fródir menn* once had sought to attain in their oral communications, was now distinctly carried out in his *Íslendingabók*. Ári Fródi was the foster-son of an old man; at the age of seven he had been entrusted, after the death of his grandfather, to wise old Hall in Haukadal, who had been a partner in trade to Saint Olaf and whose memory went back to the time when Hall, but three years old, was christened by the missionary Thangbrand. Ári Fródi's social status was that of a clergyman, or rather that of a theologically trained chieftain, like most of the literary men of his day; the backbone of his culture was the free worldly outlook characteristic of his countrymen at the time. When he was an old man, he wrote his history of Iceland, which appeared to his successor as a pattern of truthfulness and exactness; he stated his authority for each event and laid great stress on chronological sequence.

This book was written in a longer and a shorter form. The latter is a supplement or revised edition (1134); the longer form contained also the story of the Norwegian kings and Icelandic family-trees. New works soon blossomed from these sections. The family-trees were expanded by several hands, until they finally constituted a complete *Landnámabók,*

an enumeration of all persons who had settled in Iceland. From Ári's data concerning the life of the Norwegian kings originated all the later works on Norwegian history, including Snorri Sturluson's great collection of Sagas of the Kings. Other men furnished continuations and wrote the history of their own times, more comprehensively and vividly than Ári could have done; for instance, the Icelandic Abbot Karl, who wrote the Saga of King Sverrir from Sverrir's own report.

The Sagas of the Kings had been a body of narratives, like the Icelandic sagas; but in the hands of learned men they were denuded of a great mass of fantastically anecdotic and entertaining material; contemporary skaldic verses were woven in in large numbers as evidence, and the verified events and connections with contemporary history were placed in the foreground.

Snorri Sturluson occupies the first place. On the whole, he may be said to represent Icelandic civilization at its highest level. He was the master of a large farm, the most prominent politician of his day, a learned jurist, the greatest skald of several centuries, the only true scholar among the mythologists, and in his historical writings the culmination of all Icelandic literature. As a politician, he succeeded in attaining a position of the first rank and conducted his country quite ably through the trials of a difficult period. Now that property and the position of chief-

tain were the privilege of a few, the constitution of the country suffered a decline, for the very basis of the constitution was in the fact that there were not only disputants, but also a great body of men who were interested in the preservation of peace. Raids and plunderings became very frequent; it was difficult to set the machinery of justice in motion. Simultaneously, the Norwegian king began to reach out his hand for Iceland. Snorri participated, on the whole with moderation, in the domestic feuds, and was able to call a halt to the plan of conquest directed against Iceland, by himself undertaking to be the king's "vassal"—of course without any intention of taking this relation of subordination seriously. Thus he kept himself and his country above water after a fashion, until a ruthless rival, in a September night in the year 1241, attacked and slew him on his farm at Reykjaholt. The land was now involved in a long and bloody domestic feud, which ended in its acceptance of the king of Norway as its ruler.

In the midst of all these occupations, interrupted by a number of long visits to the royal court of Norway, Snorri found time for extensive literary labors: for skaldic poems, for the mythological work, the Younger Edda, and for his book on the history of Norway, the Sagas of the Norwegian Kings, or—to use the later name—the Heimskringla. This work does not deal, as the latter name would indicate, with the entire "circle of the universe," but with the Nor-

wegian royal dynasty from its remote origin in the tribe of the Asir down to the time when Sverrir laid the foundation for a new epoch in the history of Norway. Like Ari's work, it begins with an introduction that serves as a criticism of sources, and Snorri felt his method to be all the more reliable in that he boldly ventured to attack the motley world of myth and heroic legend in order to distill natural and human history therefrom. Though his mode of thought is quite unlike that of the sagas proper, he presents all the more distinct evidence thereby of the vigor of Icelandic rationalism even when faced with difficult material. But the story becomes more and more excellent the farther it advances in time. With a careful hand Snorri corrects the mistakes of his predecessors; no one else can extract as he does from an ancient skaldic verse the details of an action, and when he passes over a battlefield, he is able to decide with the swift glance of a chieftain how the course of battle ran. But his most brilliant trait is his understanding of character and of the grouping of the action; he was not only Ári's pupil, but also profited by the fine narrative art of the Icelandic sagas. The Sagas of the Norwegian Kings are a family saga; the exalted talents and great aims of the dynasty are the content. Sometimes these talents are found divided; one king is a viking, another a prince of peace, but when all are united in one man, they produce a great heroic ruler, Saint Olaf, chosen by God to be the

founder of the Christian commonwealth. We shall quote a short section of this chronicle, which illustrates both Snorri's criticism of sources and his understanding of character.

"Halldor, the son of Brynjulf Ulfaldi the Old, was an intelligent man and great chieftain; he heard that the character of the two brothers, Olaf the Holy and King Harald Hardrádi, was considered by many to be much dissimilar, and he then spake the following: 'I stood in great favor with both brothers and knew the mode of mind of both; I have never seen two men that were more like each other in their thoughts; both were intelligent and skillful in arms, eager for property and power, dominant natures and not easy to manage in transactions, stern and inclined to punish. King Olaf forced the people to accept Christianity and the true faith, but he punished him cruelly who shut his ear against it; the chieftains of the land were unwilling to tolerate his justice and impartiality, gathered an army against him, and slew him on his own soil—therefore he was sainted. King Harald undertook harrying expeditions in order to acquire fame and power; he forced as many people under his domination as he could, and fell in battle on the soil of another king. Both brothers showed in their daily life a worthy and aristocratic bearing, had traveled much, and were men of enterprise, thereby becoming far-famed and celebrated.' "

It was indeed true that these two men had been represented as very dissimilar. One had been lauded as a saint for two hundred years; the other was remembered as a tyrant. Snorri—and the authority on whom he depends—sees the human aspect of both, describes in both the same belligerent chieftain strength, and recognizes therein the family resemblance; but he does not doubt for a moment what their essential difference is: Harald, who undertook harrying expeditions in order to gain fame, and finally was slain on the land of another king, was a viking; Olaf, who "forced the people into Christianity and the true faith," represents the new kingship with its social problem. Snorri states this in a subdued and cautious manner. If we would hear Snorri's entire opinion of Olaf, we must go back to the dream of Halfdan the Black, who beheld all the locks that grew out of his head, one of which outshone all the others.

Snorri combines in himself the whole gamut of Icelandic art from the inspired to the objective—yet with a certain predilection for what was calm, peaceful, and restrained. He lacks that gushing forth from hidden depths which is so clearly felt in Egil's Saga.

The skaldic poetry in Iceland knew no such rich development as the historical narrative attained. In fact it had already reached its highest perfection in the first generation after the settlement of the country. But it continued to be practiced even in later days, and was of great significance in another way:

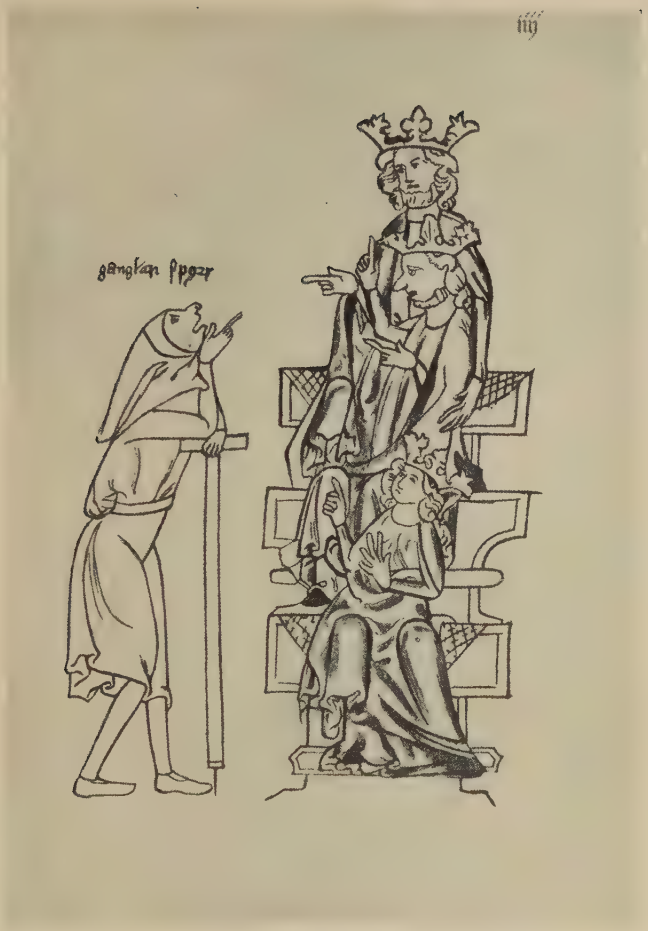


ILLUSTRATION
FROM "THE BEGUILING OF GYLFI"
in the Prose Edda by Snorri Sturluson, showing Gylfi asking the advice of the Three Odins, "High, Equally High, and Third"

it became the foundation of certain essential phases of scholarly pursuits in Iceland.

The skald was obliged to know the ancient world of myth, for it was from this source that he gained a very essential portion of his figurative language. The lively narrative stuff of the olden days, the adventures of Thor with the Giants and the death of Balder, continued to be told and—in spite of their pagan content—tolerated, because it was a necessary element in the skaldic poetry. The ancient lays of gods and heroes were also preserved in men's memories because of their wealth of mythic names and conceptions—probably through an historical interest in all that their fathers had believed. Later, perhaps as early as the close of the twelfth century, these were compiled as a book, at first nameless, but now called the Elder Edda. Then came Snorri Sturluson, who in this field also represents a culmination of the Icelandic development, and wrote his handbook for skalds, the Edda which is now called the Younger Edda or Snorri's Edda.

The first and most noteworthy part of this book is "The Beguiling of Gylfi" (Gylfaginning), a recapitulation of all the curious things encountered by King Gylfi when he set out for distant Asgard for the purpose of becoming acquainted with the tribe of the Asir. Here he encounters three kings, actually three different incarnations of Odin: Hárr, Jafnhárr, and Thridi, i.e., the high, the equally high, and the

third; they relate to him the ancient sagas of the origin of the world and the events of antiquity. Snorri's conception of myths is that which is customary in the medieval world of books: the gods are a race that has brought the wisdom and magic arts of the Orient to the North. In the Heimskringla, he expresses this thought in detail; in "The Beguiling of Gylfi," his purpose of recalling the world creation of "All-Father" and the deeds of the Asir lies like a light veil over the old myths. For the most part, Snorri permits the myths to shine in their own gorgeous colors; he grants them the life and illumination imparted to them by the poet of Völuspá and spins the motley texture of the mythic fairy tale between them. Thus he created the book which was for many centuries the most important source of knowledge regarding the gods of the North, and which the more profound study of sources in later ages will never entirely replace.

After the three-phased Odin, in this first section of the Edda, Bragi, being the god of poetry, next holds the floor, to report on the origin of poetry in Suttung's mead; and now the tale resolves itself into a set of instructions on the preparation of poetic images, which are animated by interpolated myths and skaldic verses. The last section, "Háttatal," contains a complete prosody, based on Snorri's Drápa of King Hákon and Jarl Skuli, composed in one hundred and one different meters.

The additions made by Snorri's younger kinsmen to his Edda, in the form of introductions and supplements, have no special importance; these men were fettered more or less by their attempts to transfer the Latin culture to Icelandic conditions. But even before Snorri, in the period immediately following Ári, there lived a grammatical writer—unfortunately nameless—who wrote a brilliant treatise on the sounds and orthography of the Icelandic language. His ear was sharpened by the rhyming art of the skalds so that it was able to appreciate the most delicate similarities and differences; his treatise had the practical aim of training his countrymen in the use of the Latin alphabet for their mother tongue; and to a modern philological investigator it is a gold mine of accurate observations.

The Icelanders were also learned in jurisprudence. In this faculty they were not alone, since they stood on the shoulders of the other Scandinavians. A certain predilection for brooding and for the consistent pursuit of a single thought seems to have found expression in this field. The thing, once we have entered the historical period, no longer bears the impress of the simple judicial life of the age when the entire thing assembly passed judgment, and the litigation was as simple and objective as possible—even though it was still possible to bring a grain thief to the thing with a sheaf bound across his back and to string him up on the spot, possibly with a wolf by his

side. The thing procedure was a precise and serious investigation; a special committee of judges became more and more important. Above all, the aim was to formulate the rules of justice as specifically as possible: so and so much was to be paid as a fine for the slaying of a freeman, so much for a foreigner, so much for a housecarl; so much for a stomach-wound, so much for a bone-wound, so much for a piece of bone chopped off, "which is large enough to make a sound when it drops into the basin," and so much less if this condition was not fulfilled. The proper formulas were devised for accusation, for indictment, for defense; men of good repute had to testify that the incident stated in the formula had actually occurred in each case. But the judge did not attempt to picture to himself the actual incident, and the trial degenerated into a hide-and-seek game for testing the ingenuity of the various parties; the important thing was to know the right formula and to find the hole in the adversary's armor that would be large enough to admit a serious objection. As early as the Lay of Ingjald, we find mock is made of the juridical sophistication of the new era, but we encounter it in much more pronounced form when we come to the Icelandic sagas. Here we behold both parties with their witnesses and their huge retinues of friends worming their way through the endless mass of formulas, while the bystanders listen tensely, and a wise counselor

sits silent in one of the thing booths holding the strings of the trial in his hands.

Though many a case perhaps was won unjustly or invalidated by a legal technicality on the part of the opponent, there is no doubt that we may regard it as a step in progress that the battleground has been shifted from a bloody encounter with arms and a ceaseless resort to self-aid, to the thing-ground, enclosed by consecrated "holy cords." In this way the people were trained in the art of thinking, and the community sense advanced. The model land was Iceland, where the centralized legal state was founded at a single gathering at the close of the land-taking period; one man was chosen to travel over the country in order to select a place for the Althing; another was to proceed to Norway and return with a finished law for the new social body.

Everywhere in Scandinavia now there was law, not only a law of custom, in which recourse was had, from memory, to the most recent previous case, but also distinct rules for what was to be considered valid law. Everywhere in the North we find public recitations of the law. Iceland's law speaker, who declaims the valid law from a hillock, the "Mount of Laws," at the close of each Althing, has become most famous of all. Anything omitted by him in his recital, without subsequent censure, had lost its validity. Still more authority was held by the Swedish law speaker, who was also the spokesman of the people as opposed

to the king. In Denmark we may infer the presence of a reciting authority from the comparative scarcity of the word "we" in the texts of the laws. But everywhere the language of the laws is formulated with such clarity and finality that the legal provisions can easily be memorized.

This juristic discipline in the formulation of a thought must be included in any consideration of the presuppositions for the mere verbal eloquence in political discussions; perhaps also for the ultimate formulation of the saga style. The first written literature arose from the recitation of the laws. In 1117 the Icelandic Althing adopted a resolution to have the law set down in writing, and records of the laws were made in the various countries of Scandinavia in the course of the twelfth century. In this permanent version, the laws became the citadel of the domestic civilization against the new elements that were entering from without. Latin never gained a foothold here as the first language; the Roman law never dominated here; in fact, King Sverrir caused the ancient Norwegian law book, the Grágás (gray goose) to be brought, physically, to the thing of the Thröndi; and against the altogether too hierarchical Archbishop of Lund rose a many-voiced popular chorus in the words, "With men of Skåne the word is now: never would they a wrong allow!" If we desire to trace these laws in their future development—as well as in their ancient roots—we shall find ramifications

of them through the law books of our own day. Many an ancient ordinance is still in force; in fact the last of the old written codes, the Jutish Law, valid for Slesvig, was not finally abolished until the year 1900.

XI. THE ERA OF THE BALLADS

THE unique quality of Iceland's culture was largely due to the fact that it was a continuation of a more ancient life; it grew entirely out of the Viking civilization. The powerful impressions and the new social structures that came in with the Viking Age were given an opportunity to mature. All later movements expanded much less vigorously, merely ruffling the surface; they produced no turbulent conflicting currents of old and new. The religious life, the power of the Church, the rule of kings, the system of the nobility, and the chivalric poetry reached Iceland only as a feeble echo.

In the other three ancient Scandinavian realms the situation was somewhat different. The royal power, ecclesiastical disputes, the awakening to monastic life, chivalry—all these appear there, not on so large a scale as in the cultural centers of the South or West, yet powerful enough to become real experiences. Waves of poetry—chivalric popular poetry—and of mystical religiosity, as exemplified by Saint

Birgitta, in Sweden, pass over Scandinavia. The main current is that of the general European development, which is accepted by Scandinavians, but never in a spasmodic Japanese fashion, always in such a manner that not only the individual human beings with their native psychical traits, but also a goodly portion of their cultural heritage, their forms of mental and physical productivity, are carried over into the new movement.

Denmark was most exposed to influences from the South; here the new ideas could bring forth their fruit most rapidly. And yet this medieval culture was in many respects still influenced by the proximity of the older Scandinavian life.

In the eleventh century, Denmark in most things still resembled the other parts of Scandinavia. The use of runes passed slowly away. Adam of Bremen, who traveled through Denmark toward the end of the century, was surprised by the pagan and barbarous impress which still was characteristic of its entire life. The vikings were still returning home with booty-laden ships, paying the king of the realm his share. A girl who had been seduced could still be sold in a foreign land as a slave. The men were stiff-necked, and would rather lose their lives than suffer bodily chastisement; they took pride in appearing cheerful when sentence was pronounced on them, nor did they weep even over the loss of their loved ones.

The twelfth century introduced certain changes; most of these were in the religious field. Christianity had hitherto been a power to transform the law and the habits of life externally, rather than to touch the depths of the soul. Not ardent expounders of the gospel, but kings who were fighting to realize their Charlemagne ideal—that of the royal power as a mentor leading to a Christian mode of life—had been martyrs for the new faith, here as elsewhere in Scandinavia.

The twelfth century changed all this. The religious movements set in as stirrings in the depths of the people, instinctive reactions in the masses. Now the crowd enthusiastically seized on the demand for celibacy of the priests; now it assembled about the graves of saints, which were becoming popular. The same people who looked on coldly when Saint Knud was interred (1095 and 1101), now flocked in hosts to his altar. The upper classes, the aristocrats and many priests, observed this with distaste. They attempted to defile the spring of Knud Lavard,—as the aristocratic lady who cried derisively to the worshiping rabble: "If he cannot straighten the curved tip of my shoe, he can not heal you!" But soon she herself returned to drink of the spring, as she writhed in terrible pain; the saint was after all the stronger. A serious, believing, psalm-singing, religious life centered in these holy graves. From the churches, more still from the monasteries which were now being built

and often established with the aid of the most zealous of the foreign monks, the medieval religiosity radiated into the masses and took the most varied forms.

Even worldly activities were transformed during this period. "Saxon singers"—as they were called—recited the heroic legends of their homeland in romantic-chivalrous versions, while the Icelandic skald left the Danish royal court in disappointment. The dance also was introduced, with its little couplets of constantly varied type, later with its gripping narrative songs, our medieval ballads.

In the externals of life, the splendor of the chivalrous period was emulated; the fruitful fields and the bounteous supply of fish in the sounds afforded wealth enough to purchase the commodities of the South. In Knud Lavard's days these tendencies had only aroused indignation, coupled with an impulse to stick a dagger through the silken garb. But soon all the Danes had discarded the short seaman's jacket, and arrayed themselves in silk and scarlet. It became fashionable to attend German courts or French universities. After the cessation of the inter-Scandinavian unions, with the death of Margreta Fredkulla, the royal family was allied with the German civilization by marriage. The military system also followed foreign patterns, after the Battle of Fodevig in Skåne (1134), that "bitter and cruel day," had taught the popular army that it was not equal to an attack by horsemen.

Denmark seemed to be succumbing completely to

the European civilization of the time; and the hostile class interests characteristic of that civilization were beginning to effect a dissolution of the ancient community. The struggles with the Wends in the latter half of the twelfth century brought a temporary reaction, by reviving the older customs and forms of life. Under the dangerous pressure of the Wendish attacks, the ancient society of vikings again appeared. These vikings called themselves the "Roskilde Brothers." They received communion before each campaign; they liberated all Christian prisoners, and presented them with a cloak besides. In other respects, however, they were what they called themselves, vikings; their plain food, their couch on the rowing-bench of the ship, their vigilance when any danger threatened, their strictly administered equality of privileges—all these things recall Starkad's viking ideal. They lived on the spoils taken from the enemy; they took ships and foodstuffs when they needed them, paying for them with a certain share of the booty. This league, the principal headquarters of which were at Roskilde in Denmark, recruited members from all over the island of Zealand, the ancient home of the vikings. At one time it counted twenty-two ship's crews, and they captured altogether four times as many Wendish vessels. Soon, however, the fight was carried on by the great levies of the realm, the people's army under the leadership of Valdemar the Great and Bishop Absalon, setting forth in full

force, or in smaller detachments, for long harrying trips. During the Wendish war, which lasted for more than twenty years without interruption, until the enemy's resistance was broken, the Danes lived according to the ancient viking pattern.

Let us cite a single instance out of the numerous hard tests to which these warriors were subjected in the struggle. The incident is that of Esbern Snare, who issued the following orders when about to pierce the line of the Wendish fleet with his one ship: "All men in armor will keep their places; the others will stand with me at the prow and send a shower of arrows upon the enemy. If we get through the enemy's line, these men will run back to the stern and give them another volley. No one must speak a word during the fight, so that you can hear what I bid you. If I fall, Tue has the command; if he falls, it passes to Esger; if Esger also falls, it will hardly be possible to offer further resistance."—"How shall I defend myself?" says the helmsman. "I need both my hands to manage the rudder." Esbern hands him his breastplate.—This is an example of the audacious courage of the viking, also of his clear grasp of a situation in the midst of danger! Or, let us listen to Esbern when he addresses the thing. In the gathering at Odense, in 1187, after the fall of Jerusalem, a crusade is being preached. Esbern steps forth; he reminds his hearers how all lands as far as Constantinople and Lombardy have witnessed the great deeds

of the fathers; England, Normandy, and the lands of the East have succumbed to their power; and now he urges his countrymen, who have not the fame of their forefathers, to aspire to equally high goals. Here we have again a Starkad speech in the midst of the Christian era, and the warriors were carried away by its enthusiasm.

Esbern's brother, Bishop Absalon, was also very strongly impressed with the glorious memories of the past, and cultivated them in a more conscious manner. They were all present in his mind, from the heroic legends of his childhood home in Zealand to the sagas of the Icelanders. He ordered chronicles to be written, and laws recorded for the staff of the house; he had runes carved. At the same time, many elements dwelt in his rich spirit which did not bear the impress of the ancient times. In the midst of war, the Christmas mass echoed in his soul; his Parisian university culture and the mystical monastic religiosity had gripped him profoundly, and he invited the zealous advocates of the latter to visit the Scandinavian lands where spiritual life was still dormant. He organized the State; he founded the capital, Copenhagen. The cultural task of the Church as the right hand of royalty was so vividly present in his mind that he was able to convince all his contemporaries, both laymen and scholars.

The literature of Absalon's day reflects in a remarkable manner this return to antiquity with its

variations of strength and depth. Roskilde in Zealand, Absalon's first bishop's see, witnessed the first turning to that past which the Church for many years would have none of. A clerk of very limited culture wrote his chronicle of the kings of Leire, which is a faithful picture of the current legendary material of the day. It is rich in local legends and merry tales, occasionally raised to a higher level by patriotic sentiments, but on the whole curiously remote from the spirit of heroism that originally produced these legends.

Svend Aggeson was the next to attempt the writing of a Danish history; Svend was a nobleman of Skåne of high Jutish descent, equipped with a fine literary culture that expressed itself in a rich vocabulary and an ornate style; but his independence of mind made him master of his material. In his short chronicle he selected from the material available, emphasizing only the most important events: the liberation of Denmark from menacing peril, the deeds of Uffi and Thyra Danebod. He also made a selection of the sources, rejecting—his eye obviously on his predecessor—all the merely fabulous elements and questioning "the old men." His authorities were excellent; they were *fródir menn* of the right sort; his enumeration of the ancient kings is the most genuine in all Scandinavian literature. With astonishing caution, he never stated anything that was not justified by his sources; he used vague expressions as soon as there was

the slightest doubt; left to "a learned successor," i.e., Saxo, the task of disposing of difficult passages. In his story of his times, he dwelt on the experiences of his own line and particularly on the things he had seen "with his own eyes." Even though he might feel a purely personal satisfaction in observing that he could report on the beauty of Queen Sofia from his own observation, or that he himself had witnessed the razing of the walls of Julin, his statements are none the less always characterized by a critical sense. He paid tribute to the new age only in his Latin style, in his somewhat courtly manner, and in the roses and lilies he painted on Thyra Danebod's cheeks. The strongest element in his mental makeup was the spirit of the ancient noble lines, the leading statesmen of the Viking Age, with their wide horizon and their matter-of-factness; he is closely akin to Ári and the entire Icelandic school. He had a grasp of the greatness of the ancient heroic legends, so far as he knew them, and yet we miss a certain profound note; why should he have Uffi only wound his adversary in the hip, if the sword Skrep has the quality of cutting through everything it strikes?

At the time when Svend Aggeson wrote his short history of Denmark, not long after the great victory over Bugislav in 1184, Absalon had already instructed a cleric of his retinue to compose an extensive Danish history. This young cleric, Saxo, had attained the master's degree in the "liberal arts" by studies in for-

eign parts, no doubt in Paris. He had been in close contact with the study and imitation of the ancient, post-classical, artificial, literature which was then coming in; perhaps he also was familiar with the tendency to write history with a national consciousness and a romantic coloring, which had arisen especially on Anglo-Celtic soil. Absalon made this young linguist his personal secretary; he probably soon discovered that Saxo, a son and grandson of noblemen who had fought in Valdemar's army, was closely attached to his fatherland and well suited "to fight for it with weapons of the mind." Saxo labored over his Chronicle for an entire generation. We hear of it for the first time about the year 1185, and long after Absalon's death, in the year 1216, when Valdemar II "had extended his rule over the tidal waters of the Elbe," we find him writing the foreword to the great work.

Originally planned to be a history of his own times, this work is expanded into a complete history of Denmark, into the *Gesta Danorum*. "I have followed Absalon's records, both of matters carried out by himself, and of matters he learned concerning the deeds of others; I have received his worthy presentation as a divine injunction." Saxo's work is the richest collection of animated pictures in all this period that brought Denmark liberty and greatness. It is a unique work of memoirs, born from the memory of the greatest mind of the land, and of its kind excelled by

no later work. At the same time, however, Saxo's Chronicle reveals to us an ancient world which we might otherwise have believed to be already extinct. Saxo knew how to delve for memories of the past in the folk mind as well as in the minds of Absalon and others, and he wove all these strands into a rich tapestry, on which the great figures stand forth boldly against a background filled with a host of living forms, the real and the fantastic intermingled as in the profuse carvings on a wooden church. A closer examination of the Scandinavian antiquities found in Saxo will show that they are, in the main, taken from two sources. One of these is the traditions of Denmark, particularly of Zealand, the ancient seat of chieftains, preserving the large but succinct scenes of the heroic lays; the other is the Norwegian romantic sagas, particularly those that were told in the southwestern coastal regions. Saxo must have obtained these either from an Icelandic saga teller, perhaps the skald Arnald Islænding, who is mentioned among Absalon's retinue in 1167 and subsequent years or, more probably, from the exiled Norwegian prelates whom he met repeatedly at the archbishop's court. In this way Saxo's work became a combination of the most varied mental currents; it became pan-Scandinavian as no previous work had been, embracing the entire gamut, from the solid strength of the ancient legend down to the softer fancies of the romantic sagas. Saxo remained unappreciative of only

one important element, namely, the contribution of Iceland to the mental development of the North, although he occasionally lauds the love of these islanders for truthful history. He could not read in the original the Icelandic literature which was at the height of its blossoming period during his lifetime; nor could he attain the cool clarity of the Icelanders either in his investigations or in his presentation. His mind and his view have a warmth like that of the call to battle in the Bjarkamál or like Starkad's vehement denunciations; but he feels an even stronger urge to express his feelings. The sonorous cadences of the Latin lend themselves well to such expression, but probably the feelings themselves, in their deepest essence, are more Zealandic than one imagines. Saxo's emotional life appears somewhat stunted in one respect, namely, in his strange unresponsiveness to religious things, so different from the attitude of his master, Absalon; heroic prowess and posthumous fame appeared to him the highest ideals, as they did to Bjarki and Ingjald. In fact, it is remarkable how well his reconstruction of antiquity accords with his reminiscences of his own era; they could be placed side by side, trait for trait, and would prove only that the two worlds are identical: Esbern's chivalrous warrior life seems a repetition now of Uffi's, now of Starkad's. One cannot but feel that this epoch realizes in clarified form the aspirations that had for many centuries lived in the minds of the people.

Even while Saxo was composing his Chronicle, with his mind turned to the past, new conditions were developing. In the late spring, the forests of north Zealand were filled with singing and jubilant hosts; reports of miracles and healings flew from mouth to mouth. The monastery church at Æbeltoft was the goal for great masses of pilgrims. The monastic ideal suddenly stood before them in all its splendor. They had seen the Frenchman, Abbot Vilhelm—called in by Absalon—at work among them, had seen him do battle for his principles and put them through against obstinate resistance, but also humbling himself and doing penance daily. They had stood by silently at his sickbed while his impending death gave added sacredness to Holy Week, until he breathed out his soul one Easter morning at the first streak of dawn. They began to feel that through humility one might enter into bliss, and they shouted with joy when the Lord showed His strength in that hallowed spot.

Such was the state of mind among the monks and the masses of the people. But Andreas, Absalon's successor on the archbishop's throne at Lund, was of other mettle. In a poem which is a "miraculous work of erudition," the *Hexæmeron,* Andreas gathered together a great number of things that he had learned in the universities abroad; it was a scholastic threshing out of all the questions of the faith. Again, there is the figure of Bishop Gunnar of Viborg. As he sits clad in his sheepskin over his white monkish garb,

cheerful and hospitable, as he administers with calm hand all the affairs and all the possessions of the bishopric, he may perchance call to mind the peaceful wealthy peasants of the ancient time. He is also learned in the law; but the influence which he exerts on the group of young clerics in his bishopric, on the nuns in Asmild, or on the noblewomen of his region, is that of a life lived in the faith of the Church, with a dash of humanistic culture. With a Latin verse on his lips, he goes out to make an enraged peasant listen to reason; or he engages in a merry contest of wits with clerics who have just returned from Paris; but when he calls "Jens, fetch thine ink-pot," the young cleric who takes his seat at the bishop's feet, with his writing-tablet on his knees, knows that now he is to record contemplations of a theological or an edifying character. So accessible has the new culture now become; Bishop Gunnar with his wit and refinement is a figure that might fit just as well in the Denmark of the nineteenth century as in the environment of Scandinavian antiquity and the Wendish campaigns.

Social upheavals have meanwhile been taking place. A nobility has come into being, consisting of the more wealthy, particularly the more warlike, sections of the ancient peasantry. Among them are sea-captains, hereditary chieftains of a group of peasants owing military service, and particularly the old families of

landed proprietors, who now have secured for themselves still greater holdings of peasant properties, acquired through inheritance, purchase, or clearing of the forest. But in general they include all persons who, regardless of the degree of their wealth, are ready to spend the entire summer away from home in the service of the king, for which they are rewarded by spoils and by exemption from imposts. They are the vassals of the king (Danish *herremænd*); the ancient right of housecarls, the *vederlov,* is extended to apply to all. Small wonder that so much of the viking spirit is to be found in this warrior community; we may trace elements of cunning and audacity, but also of sobriety and intelligence, even in the knights and maidens of the Ballads, who, in spite of their lyrical enthusiasm, do not lose their sound intelligence or their firm tread on earth.

It might be better to speak of the peasant class as a new class of society, although from a juristic point of view it is quite ancient. The newly risen estate of the nobles or vassals of the king deprived the peasant society of its most warlike and intellectually most capable members; there remained behind those that preferred paying imposts to performing military services. They assumed the duties of the old race of thralls, and, by means of the assiduous practice of agriculture, provided themselves with some home comforts as a substitute for a diminished prestige in society and for a decreased independence, since

most of them lived as tenants on the soil of others. They worked shoulder to shoulder to impart to Denmark its present aspect: rich level fields and the familiar nestling country towns. The melancholy song of the slave woman grinding meal was replaced by the clattering of the mill wheel; no one was subjected to unusual exertions, since the burdens were borne in equal measure by all. The powerful vassals of the king were, as we have said, the old families without much new blood; the names on the rune stones frequently occur again among the younger nobility. But the tall, straight warriors who had caused the Danish name to be feared, and whose remains were crumbling in the graves of the Iron Age, died out or were absorbed by the common people. The great Valdemars perhaps still represented this type in its purity; but the churchyards of the later Middle Ages may be searched in vain for traces of the dolichocephalic population in its more pronounced forms. New strata of the population grew up from the soil; new thoughts made a way for themselves.

NOTHING is more characteristic of this new era than the Ballads. Even their outer form is new: instead of the alliterative verse of the ancients, strophes with end rhymes appear, an art form borrowed from the Romance languages at the end of the older epoch, and penetrating everywhere, together with the ecclesiastical and chivalrous life.

With this poetry came also the dance. Formerly there had only been very naïve forms of dance in the playing of children or in the outbreaks of joy among young people when they "brought in the summer"; now the word "dance" came in, and the art was an accomplishment closely associated with the new lyric poetry. The men of the olden time regarded the dance as a foreign and distasteful custom. Its flexibility, its susceptibility to mood, its vague longing, its smoldering eroticism—this was entirely opposed to the ideal of fortitude that underlay the heroic song of the ancient period. Hence we find the skalds mocking the hopping and skipping of the dancers; Saxo at times scourges the power which the dance has over his contemporaries, but for the most part he passes it over in silence.

The dance and the new poetry, both full of lyric spirit, color, and impressions of nature, spread like the springtime when the snow melts and the blossoms suddenly start to sprout. This change in the life of the people takes place in the twelfth century and at the beginning of the thirteenth. From the farmhouses of Iceland to the monastic halls at Eskilsö, everybody danced. Nor can the new passion be regarded as foreign—although the connection with the foreign chivalric poetry was obvious—but rather as an awakening of a latent native energy. Underneath the Germanic stock, with its strength of will and its mental acumen, its taciturnity and love of

drinking, there was a concealed stratum of folk who were glad to turn away from the day's labor and surrender themselves to the merry or even the melancholy expressions of the moment: to shout with jubilation, to lament, to submit to depression, or at least to express all these things in song. We accordingly find not only the courtiers at the royal court, but also the peasants, accepting the new lyric forms of life. The glamour of poetry was diffused over ancient popular customs of all kinds, over the spring festival and the bonfire, over the Midsummer Night celebration down by the shore or in the open clearing by the sacred spring, even—and why not?—beside the church, during the vigils preceding the great festivals where the song of the monks only occasionally imposed silence on the turbulent crowd of people.

The inner life became quite different from that of the olden times; the conception of nature was changed. In earlier days men had a sense of the imposing and warlike qualities of nature. The viking understood the sea because he was obliged to exert his strength to fight the element; he understood the beast of prey, and reveled with bacchantic fury in blood and corpses and the claws of eagles; he understood the lone fir tree exposed to the might of the storm and drought. But the gentler feeling for nature remained stunted. Then came the time of the Ballads, which brought an eye for "the growing of the grass," for the grove putting on fresh leaves,

which loved the lily and the rose, the strange luminous flowers in the garden, more still the delicate light green and gold of the lime tree—as contrasted with the hard slender ash of a more ancient day—in short, "joy and bird song." It loved the soft light of the summer and loved it more the farther it penetrated north on white swan-wings: "Then comes pleasure in rejoicing my white lily!" The seasons of nature enter the soul of man more than at any previous epoch, both the time when the lime tree turns green, and the time when the foliage withers and falls. Springs then gush forth in the breast of man also; all the joy and suffering of life may now be sung in words. Who would not now send a "love tune" to her who faces him in the dance? Who would not now —discarding purposes in life and other serious things—drink to a fair one: "So lovely it is and gladsome when thee I behold; I would sally forth to the green grove with thee, maiden!" Who would not give expression to what is in his soul: "Alas, my sorrows are as lead so heavy"; "May the Lord God take from our breasts our care and fear!"

But the billows that now surged over Scandinavia were not only torrents of sentiment. Specific ideas also crept in, garbed in the form of narrative poems. Sometimes they came to us from their home in France, many more from their second home in England; also the heroic lays carried about by German minstrels may in part be counted with this movement. They

were ballads in a simple, almost childishly clear style; hardly had they set foot on the new soil than even the plainest peasant could sing them. From England came the song of Emperor Henry and Queen Gunhild: the evil counselor traduces the queen to her husband, but when she is about to be sentenced, a young fellow appears, named Mimering, to prove her innocence by an ordeal of God, when he slays the traducer in single combat. In this legend we have the first emphatic chivalrous intervention to protect a woman. Another song which came to Scandinavia from England arose from the legend attending the birth of the English king, Athelstan, and was called "The Maiden's Morning Dream." It expresses the prevalent ideal of love and joy and a queenly crown. Then there was the song of Count Rainaud or Clerk Colvill coming home doomed to death from an encounter with the elf woman, which was a fundamental form of the song of "Sir Olaf and the Elf Girl." Coming from Normandy by way of England, this song, originally based on Celtic conceptions of the elves, became one of the most famous in Scandinavia, and was developed in a number of extremely characteristic Scandinavian forms. It gave Goethe the idea of his "Erlkönig." The principal scene is that of the youth encountering the elf maiden in the misty gray forest before dawn, refusing to be hers, and being marked by her for death. The working out of the idea presents a vacillation between the epic motiva-

tion of a former love affair between them, which he wishes to end, and the purely lyrical view that he who ventures out into the dangerous world of spirits brings death upon himself. In each case, the wandering legendary material is set in the local frame of the nebulous dance of the elves in the mists of the forest, surrounding and overpowering the doomed youth. Every tale thus coming to the surface passes through these transformations.

How rapidly the new poetry became naturalized in the North may be best judged by the number of figures from the era of the Valdemars which appear in the ballads, sometimes only as a fleeting bit of reality caught by the poem and embroidered into a new poetic setting. A complete action, a single scene, makes up the substance of most of these poems. Thus Riber-Ulf snatches the fallen flag pole and leads his fellows to victory; Stig goes to his death because he will not have his betrothed informed that he fled from battle. And the great King Valdemar becomes a central personage in the ballads, not so often because of his historical feats as because of the tragic love story connected with him. He marries Sofia, but before that has loved Tove, and the jealous Sofia burns Tove to death while she is bathing. There arises a whole cycle of ballads on the erotic and violent deeds of the king, and the hateful nature of the queen. In the next generation, that of Valdemar II, we have a new cycle of legends dealing with the lovable queen

Dagmar and her hard-hearted successor Bengerd (Berengaria); this new cycle occupies a special place in that it presents the significance of its presence in the eyes of the people and bears the earmarks of a more ardent religious life, which gains in strength in the last half of the Valdemar period. In most other ballads the strong scenes of passion are described for their own sake alone.

But none of the ballads dealing with historical personages became so popular in the later Middle Ages as did those of Sir Stig who won Regisse, the king's sister. Stig approaches the king's table as cup bearer; he casts magic runes over little Kirstin to gain her love, but the runes roll off under Lady Regisse's cloak. In despair, he seeks counsel from his foster mother; but she answers that even if he should ride to the end of the world, Lady Regisse will come to his bed this night, and his love adventure will cost him his life. By night the princess comes to his room and knocks at the door, which he does not open. She loosens the bolt and sits down on the edge of his bed. "She kisses him on his mouth so red; there lay Sir Stig as he were dead. She took him in her arm at once; he lay so still, child for the nonce." He has stood the test. The next morning, the king is informed. He pronounces judgment that Stig is to marry the princess, and the ballad concludes with the splendid wedding in Stig's home. There were fountains and white bears, stones of marble and a

hall with gilded carvings, courtly maidens sitting on the benches, and Sir Stig himself opens the dance with the cup in his hand, drinking to his young bride, so that "forest and field bloom at the sight."

No other ballad is so full of the joy in beauty and wealth characteristic of that courtly epoch, but Stig himself, who while in the arms of the princess controls his rising desire, is much more closely related to the type of his ancestors. The combination of strength of will and wisdom which marked the earlier age wins another victory when it saves his life and lays the foundation for his happiness. The Danish nobility is still distinguished by the power of a man's will even over the runes, over the magic forces that lurk about everywhere outside the house, and have so strange a gift of penetrating the inner soul of man.

But this victory is of short duration. The oncoming surge of emotion casts its spell over all; again that terror of the dark, which the viking had fought down in himself, raises its head, and the new faith adds another fear greater than before: "There is great danger to thy life, but yet more to thy soul!" Maid Mettelil sits by the prow of Sir Tidemand's ship; she is held there by his runes, and her arrogant wooer lets her sit unnoticed, mocking her half in jest. Then the tears run down from her eyes, and she plunges into the sea. Long stands Sir Tidemand and gazes after her; then he also treads the dark path to the sea-bottom.

All this uncanny sense of the lurking forces that lie outside the calm, sedate course of an orderly human life, which will bring misfortune if they are allowed to enter in, has to be expressed in song. Instead of the old mythology in which the Asir slew the Giants, we now have a new mythology in which human beings succumb to elves and runic charms; and all this is given poetic treatment until the emotion has spent itself, and the terror that once was real has become merely an esthetic sensation. Not till then does one begin to feel compassion for the spirits that are imprisoned in the elfin habitation, for the mermaid who prophesies misfortune, and who is herself so cruelly shut off from the hope of eternal bliss.

The connection with the mental life of the ancient world constitutes one thread in the texture of the ballad poetry of the later Middle Ages, but only one. From the many elements in its heroic legends, Denmark took only the love poetry, which was re-created with rich, strong coloring. In the matter of form, the heritage from the older period is seen in the predilection for the short poem, for sharp characterization, and dialogue in quick, contrasting stanzas. The Norwegian people made a far fuller use of their ancient poetry, particularly of the romantic sagas. Though these poems were not so good as the Danish lays in their artistic form, they reflected a rich and fantastic imagination. From Norway they were disseminated in southern and eastern Scandinavia; in fact, the

ballads found acceptance all over the North; each nation contributed its most remarkable productions to the common poetic fund of all.

The ballad poetry found its richest material in Danish chivalry. Hundreds of these songs have their source entirely in the life as it was then lived; the popular customs are reflected with the impress of experiences both of the recent and the more remote past. Many an ardent trait will therefore be found repeated in this literature. In addition to the two cycles of legends from the days of the Valdemars, a third cycle arose: that which was associated with the murder of King Erik Klipping (1286) and the activities of the outlawed nobles during the subsequent period of unrest. Stig, marshal of the realm, the most distinguished of the outlaws, gradually is made the chief character. In one of the oldest ballads he appears at the thing; he is accused, though innocent, of murdering the king and, when adjudged guilty, hurls words of menace and defiance. Later a motive for the regicide is found in the fact that the king has given offense to the wife of the marshal, wherefore the latter wreaks dire vengeance. Finally, in the fourteenth century, the motives are assembled in a huge poem in which the figure of the marshal stands forth impressively as that of an upright but austere knight who avenges the insult to his wife, defies the young monarch's ban of outlawry, and lives as an indomitable lord of the fastness and as a pirate on the little

WALL PAINTINGS

in Örslev Church, Denmark, from about 1400, illustrating the ballads then in vogue

island of Hjelm—a true picture of the ideal independent knight of the period.

The ballad poetry of the later Middle Ages is closely and peculiarly associated with the religious life of the times; both aroused emotions that were latent in the depths of the soul. First to appear, of the religious subjects, were impressive visions of the next life. These suddenly arise in Scandinavia, about 1200, after having been popular in other countries from a far earlier date. They are characterized by a blending of real experience and fiction; the ballad's account of Queen Dagmar, who was restored to life by her husband's prayers, coincides curiously with the actual experiences of Ranveig, the concubine of an Iceland priest, in 1198. The Icelandic "Lay of the Sun" (Sólarliód) and the Norwegian "Draumkvæe," a sort of Christian Völuspá, arose from a rich profusion of individual accounts. The tale is as follows.

Olaf Astason falls asleep on Christmas Eve, not awakening again until the thirteenth day following. Then he rides to the church, where he sits down on the doorstep to tell the congregation of his dream: "I dwelt under the clouds so high, and at the bottom of the sea: he who would follow in my footsteps shall ne'er speak again with gladsome mouth." He has trod the path of the dead over the thorny heath, has descended into the bowels of the earth, where waters roar but are unseen, and has passed, high up in the

air, over Gjallar Bridge, whence wicked men are dropped into the depths below. He has seen hell, where the glaciers shine in a bluish light, where the murderer tugs ceaselessly at the body of his victim, while the violator of boundary-marks wrings his bleeding hands, and the miser bends under the burden of his garb of lead. He has been in the Hall of Judgment whither hosts of devils, led by the old Graybeard, repair from the north raging and roaring, while a silent train approaches from the south, Saint Michael on a white horse, the trumpet under his arm, riding on ahead of Christ; but when Michael blows the trumpet, the poor souls quake like aspen leaves in the wind. Now the Holy Mother of God, her fingers bearing red rings of gold, accosts the wanderer surrounded by the host of the dead and leads him to the starry path above, whence he has a glimpse of Paradise resplendent. "Blessed is he that giveth bread unto the poor in this world; nor shall he fear hate and mockery in the next world."

We shall not tarry over the other visionary poems. "Tongues may speak, but the soul shall answer on the Judgment Day"—this is the refrain of them all; the sense of sin is evoked by harrowing these formerly obstinate minds. But we find a more gentle literature arising in the footprints of the visionary poems: we have ballads describing Mary inquiring as to the fate of the Christ Child and learning with anguish of how he is to suffer; we have Mary Mag-

dalen washing away her transgressions in a silent hermit life of tears. The ballad poetry that began with powerful visions of hell now becomes more and more a mouthpiece for aspirations of eternity. It is not only the bird from Paradise which sings to the maiden in the forest about the joys of the heavenly kingdom; there are the three sisters who have died and who return to their mother's bedside by night to console her in her lonely mourning. "One was to twine while the other span, the third was to tell the hours as they ran." Their mother begs them to stay; she will give each of them a wealthy knight; but at the crow of the cock they hasten from her: "Far better to dwell in the heavenly hold than to walk the earth in shoon of gold. Far better it is in heaven to fare than a crown of gold on earth to wear. In heaven there is great joy!"

The bearers of these pious ballads were not the nobility but the common people. A popular divine service came into being by the side of the official church service. The Latin hymns were now given a text in the vernacular, as the pilgrim band wound on its way: "The blessed day with joy we see." Earthly life became fused with the glory of the celestial kingdom. The young maidens' procession on Saint Valborg's Day sings of Mary and Jesus: "Here come we pretty maidens all—welcome the month of May." These time-honored festivities are now best preserved on Finnish soil, at Ritvala near Åbo, their

form still permitting us to infer their Scandinavian prototypes. At Whitsun the procession begins to march in the bright light of dawn, first the young girls singing, then the married women, then the men, as they wind in and out through the village, and then, scattering flowers, proceed to the Holy Mount, where the bonfire is lighted, and the young people dance till midnight. If the celebration of this festival is omitted, the fields of Ritvala will yield no produce, and the end of the world will draw near. On the first evening they sing of Mary Magdalen, as she moistens Christ's feet with her tears; on the second evening, of proud Inger who remains true to her beloved, and behold, as she is about to be wedded to another by force and duress, the sails of his boats gleam in the sound, and he wins her back; on the third day they sing of little Anna betrayed by the strange skipper whose ship God thereupon causes to founder.

Such seems to have been the trend of all this Scandinavian poetry; everywhere we find the same indissoluble union of the life of faith and the life of poetry. At Skatelöv, in Nörrehviddinge, on the broad plains of Skåne, young men and women gathered in the bright summer night preceding Saint John's Day, around the Virgin Springs, and as they drank the water they sang of the ill-fated foolish virgins from whose blood the springs originated. It is an ancient popular festival, which the age filled with its own world of new thoughts.

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I must point out that this most ancient period still veils a number of unsolved and disputed questions. Investigation of national characteristics and racial types is yet in an incipient stage. The extent of the foreign influence is to a certain measure disputed (strongly advocated by Sophus Bugge and Alexander Bugge, opposed by Finnur Jónsson). Difficulties of this type forced me to take up various questions more fully.

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.— *A number of necessary deviations from Old Norse spellings have been made in the text, chiefly the use of Asir for Æsir and the substitution of d for the voiced spirant dh.*

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